University of Alberta

# Individual Differences: the effects of diversity in the ESL classroom

by

Lori Petruskevich ©

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education

in

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**April 7, 1997**

*En este mundo tan cruel*
*nada es verdad ni mentira*
*todo es según el color*
*del cristal con que se mira.*

Calderon de la Barca

*In this world so cruel*
*nothing is true or false*
*everything depends on the colour*
*of the crystal through which you see .*

(translation)

University of Alberta

## Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled ***Individual Difference: the effects of diversity in the ESL classroom*** submitted by **Lori Petruskevich** in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of **Master of Education** in **Adult and Higher Education**.

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## Abstract

Arising from a desire to better understand the imbalances which exist in a classroom with a diverse student population, this study examines student and instructor perceptions of how students' gender, age, educational background, and culture influenced classroom participation and learning. Observations of four adult multi-cultural English as a second language (ESL) classrooms, and interviews with 48 students and the four instructors provided insights regarding the effects of these characteristics. Strategies for addressing imbalances, suggested by both instructors and learners, are also presented. Findings reveal that these interrelated factors give rise to complex patterns of interaction. Examining any one factor alone, provides an incomplete analysis of the disadvantage or advantage, as well as of the possible ramifications.

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# Chapter I

# OVERVIEW OF THE PROBLEM

## Introduction

While teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) in Japan for three years, I noticed that male and female students did not participate equally in mixed-sex classrooms. Males were usually more active and vocal in the classes, whereas female students were usually quieter and more subdued. I often noticed that women were not interacting with other students or with me as much as the men did, and I wondered if it was due to the activities, to my instruction, to the assertive behaviour of the males, or to the personality of the individual students. These problems did not appear as frequently in the all-female classes I taught, for although some students seemed quieter than others, all students seemed to participate about the same amount. Furthermore, women were more likely to ask questions in the all-women classes than in the mixed-sex classes. Upon returning to Canada, I read about gender issues in education and realized that imbalances in participation and interaction have been well documented in North America.

In English as a second language (ESL) classes in Canada, however, the sex of the student is obviously not the only factor that can influence classroom dynamics. Unlike the relatively homogeneous classes in Japan, the majority of ESL classes in Canada are made up of students with diverse backgrounds. The varied linguistic, cultural, and educational backgrounds of the students result in a complex dynamic in the classroom, which complicates any study of classroom behaviour. Gender is only one of many factors that may influence the way students interact with each other and with the instructor. Students' previous educational experience, ethnicity, and age are just three other factors which could account for some of the imbalances in classroom participation. In fact, in the

current literature that deals with inequalities in the classroom there is a call to look beyond the sex (or gender)[1] of students when examining learning and teaching. Bilken and Pollard (1993) state that we should not limit our studies to gender, for it "operates differently as it is mediated by questions of race, class and nation; hence any exploration of gender in the working lives of teachers, for example, must pay attention to the ways the social construction of sex is positioned by race and class" (p.7).

The diversity of student backgrounds in many ESL classes in Canada produces a challenge for the instructor. The instructor must attempt to balance the individual needs of the students in the classroom, while teaching the required material. In order to do this, the instructor is obliged to a) recognize the different patterns of interaction, b) decide how to respond, c) have strategies to counteract imbalances and d) implement the strategies without compromising the course curriculum. Attempting to counteract imbalances in interaction is important, because if students do not participate to the same extent in the classroom, these differences may lead to unequal learning opportunities and thus to higher or lower levels of language acquisition (Allwright, 1984; Long, 1985). English provides employment opportunities as well as the confidence to participate in society. If some students do not learn as well as others because of limited interaction, their opportunities may be constrained outside the classroom. Therefore, the objective of this research was to examine the ways in which teachers and students interact and to identify imbalances in participation. Then, by talking to instructors and students, this study attempted to reveal whether imbalances are recognized, whether any strategies are used to resist them, and what difficulties are faced when attempting to achieve equitable participation.

A heterogeneous ESL classroom is an ideal location to observe ethnicity, educational background, gender, and age. These factors can be found in any classroom, creating a demanding environment for everyone involved, but imbalances in the language classroom could have particularly serious implications. Imbalances due to gender, ethnicity, age, and educational

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[1] Sex refers to the biological status of a person, whereas gender refers to the socialized, or learned, characteristics of a person, as influenced by the environment and sex of the individual.

background in second language classrooms could affect student learning given that interaction is considered to be essential for second language acquisition. If students do not participate equally in the classroom, students who participate more have an advantage. Initially, Krashen (1980) put forward the Input Hypothesis claiming that language acquisition is made possible through exposure to simplified language (comprehensible input). Krashen argued that a learner need never produce language or interact in order to acquire proficiency. This hypothesis was challenged by many researchers, including Long (1985), who argued that comprehensible input is a necessary but insufficient requisite for language acquisition. Interaction, according to Long, provides the opportunity for the non-native speaker (NNS) to signal that a lack of comprehension has occurred, resulting in conversational adjustments in the speech of the native speaker (NS). These adjustments are assumed to provide truly comprehensible, although not necessarily simplified, input that will enhance language acquisition.

Other researchers have examined the role of interaction in relation to NNS production. It is important to recognize that interaction provides an opportunity for students to produce language and repair their output (Swain, 1985). Students can absorb a great amount of linguistic knowledge from the comprehensible input available to them, but may have difficulties using it accurately or with confidence, unless they are forced to use it and receive feedback. This, in turn, can result in syntactic analysis on the part of the learner. Both positive and negative feedback are required for students to acquire greater proficiency. If students receive negative feedback, they are pressed to restate the phrases, usually with repairs. Therefore, if the amount and kind of interaction is unequal among L2 (second language) students, there will be repercussions for the development of language proficiency.

The role of the teacher is crucial, for the teacher orchestrates the classroom interaction and can selectively encourage participation. Thus, it is important to examine how the teacher may influence participation in the classroom, in relation to the sex, culture, and previous educational achievement (a determiner of social class) of the students. Classroom features, such as who speaks most frequently, characteristics of those persons who speak more frequently, distribution of input and opportunity, all contribute to the learning environment. The extent to which

a teacher manipulates interactions may have a significant impact on an ESL student's language learning. However, instructors may not realize that imbalances in the classroom exist. In fact, in relation to mainstream, relatively homogeneous classrooms, Sadker and Sadker (1990) state that "research indicates that instructors at the elementary and secondary levels are unaware of the classroom [gender] bias, but that with resources and training they can learn to interact on a more equitable basis with their female and male students" (p.180). It has also been stated that in ESL classes "there is, in fact, evidence of a disparity between what teachers believe they do and what they actually do in the classroom" (Nunan, 1989, p.178). In spite of the fact that few studies have been conducted to reduce sex bias in adult or higher education programs, awareness may be the foundation from which we can begin.

When examining the issues related to imbalances in participation that arise in a classroom it is important to note that these differences could be linked to socialization patterns in the society at large. In fact, the educational system is seen to play a role in reproducing social inequalities within the school environment (Hurn, 1993). As individuals, it is significant that we perceive the imbalances that exist, for only when we are aware of them are we able to examine our own roles in this dynamic. However, our early childhood socialization inhibits the formation of this awareness. For example, Sadker and Sadker (1994) point out that although they wrote their first book *Sexism in School and Society* in 1973, sexism can still be found and remains difficult to identify. They state that "it is difficult to detect sexism unless you know precisely how to observe. And if a lifetime of socialization makes it difficult to spot gender bias when you're looking for it, how much harder it is to avoid the traps when you are the one doing the teaching" (1994, p.12). Thus, schools and teachers may reproduce social inequalities in the classroom without being aware of it.

In a heterogeneous ESL classroom, each student has distinct needs and abilities, which must be balanced with the group learning objectives. Furthermore, because ESL teachers are predominantly white-middle class women, and the students have varied backgrounds, it may be difficult to bridge the differences in the classroom. This, in turn, may result in the select advantage of students with certain characteristics, and, as stated above, many of the imbalances may be difficult to recognize. However, experienced teachers may

have a greater chance of sensing that imbalances exist. In addition, they may have adopted strategies to address these issues in the class, such as how to decide whether to strongly encourage quiet students to participate or to respect their preference to avoid active participation.

Another factor which may affect participation patterns is culture, which is strongly intertwined with language. In fact, Crawford-Lange and Lange (1987) state that "culture is inseparable from language and therefore must be included in language study" (p. 258). The way that Canadian culture is incorporated into the classroom may also influence participation, because it can be demonstrated through verbal and nonverbal means. If teachers do not combat imbalances in the classroom, and encourage the active, vocal students, while allowing the quiet students to remain silent, students will obtain greater advantage or disadvantage. In such a situation, active students receive more learning opportunities, and develop greater confidence, and may have greater success within and outside of the classroom. Although inequalities exist in society, not all instructors will choose to reflect this pattern in their classrooms; some may reproduce the pattern, while others may resist it. An examination of whether or not instructors consciously intend to promote or challenge the 'natural' state of behaviour will provide insights into the relationship between classroom participation patterns, learning objectives, and the philosophy of the instructor.

The amount and nature of participation in class is important, then, for interaction is deemed essential for language learning, and the kinds of activities usedcan invite or exclude students. It seems critical to examine ways in which experienced instructors have learned to address the individual characteristics of the students while teaching the required content. Because the students will understand the classroom differently than the instructor, it is important to examine how students see participation in the ESL classroom.

## Problem Statement and Research Questions

The purpose of the current study was to examine how selected individual characteristics (ethnicity, gender, age, and educational background) are manifested in classroom participation patterns and interaction and how teachers and students perceive and respond to them.

The research questions are as follows:

1. What are the perceptions of the students of their own participation, relating to their individual characteristics, in the ESL classroom?

2. What are the perceptions of teachers concerning the effects of the student characteristics of ethnicity, age, gender, and educational background on participation in the ESL classroom?

3. What strategies, if any, do ESL instructors employ to address participation imbalances related to their students' individual characteristics?

By investigating these questions, I hope to shed light on what sort of imbalances in student participation exist, based on gender, culture, age, and educational background. The answer to these questions may also provide information on methods of balancing the individual and group needs of learners.

Observation and interviews formed the methodological basis of the study. Four classrooms were observed in which field notes were taken. Then the instructor, as well as some students, from each of these classes were interviewed. Follow-up interviews were held with the instructors and students to provide an opportunity for clarification and elaboration.

## Statement of Significance

With the great demands placed on language teachers, especially with a heterogeneous class of students, it may be difficult for them to address all of the issues that may arise. Providing individual attention to certain students may be forfeited at times due to the pressures of the curriculum or group learning projects. However, developing an awareness of the different behaviours of the students may facilitate addressing diverse needs. Looking at how some instructors perceive and respond to the situations that arise in their classes may shed light on key issues, as well as possible strategies to address them. However, it is extremely difficult to address all of the possible differences in student participation in the classroom. Because cultural identity is extremely complex, it

is not possible to develop a prescription to follow especially when the students are from different countries:

> Obviously no one can learn everything about all cultures--no one knows everything about one's own culture--but even rather sweeping generalities, so long as they are not false, may be a help, if one avoids the pitfall of stereotyping and does not expect all members of a culture to fit the generality (Valdes, 1986, p.49).

As stated by Valdes, it is not possible to understand every subtlety of every culture, but it may be helpful to have a general understanding of patterns of behaviour which may be linked to the traditions or beliefs of a group. Valdes stresses the importance of remaining flexible and open-minded in relation to culture, because it is not absolute.

Developing an awareness of individual differences, and the possible reasons for some of the differences, is the first step in recognizing their impact in the classroom. Imbalances in interaction can then be addressed by the instructors as they appear. Awareness is not always easy to achieve, however, for, as stated earlier, our primary socialization can limit our perceptions. For example, the lack of awareness of gender issues is mentioned by Pearson (1993) who provides an anecdote of a student teacher who was thrilled to have successfully led an active discussion in class. Only later did the teacher realize that 100% of the participation came from the male students; not one woman spoke. Pearson suggests that these patterns are learned behaviors, and that "teachers don't say to themselves, 'Now, she's a female; I should encourage her to speak out less'" (p.1). Rather, Pearson interprets gender bias to be part of the environment in which we function: "We learn these patterns of interaction, as well as our first language, by picking it up, by observing others, by listening to what people say, and by living in the world" (p.1). Currently, because some instructors have increased their awareness of gender issues, they are better prepared to deal with them in classes; similarly, awareness of the imbalances based on culture, educational background, and age should help instructors deal with them in the classroom.

The different styles of interaction found between the sexes may result in unequal participation in mixed classrooms where males have an advantage. Holmes (1991) states that the majority of literature that she surveyed contends

that "female students are providing an ideal context for their conversational partners, but in mixed-sex interactions they are generally receiving less than their fair share of conversational encouragement" (p.215), because they are supportive, cooperative, and willing to listen while men often compete to control the conversation. Holmes points out that in a second language classroom men may have an unfair opportunity to dominate interaction, depriving women of their fair share of valuable practice and input. However, because most research has been conducted with culturally homogeneous populations, the influences of cross-cultural discourse norms may provide results which challenge this generalized statement.

Therefore, we may benefit by talking to instructors and students to obtain insights as to the participation patterns in the classroom and techniques that could be used to balance the many demands that co-exist in the class. This may provide instructors with the opportunity to reflect on their practice and offer information that may help them address the individuality of students. For example, Laberge (1992) reports that two students in the same class held opposite perspectives on the importance of teaching grammar; one said that for her grammar is essential, while the other said that "it's not a good way to teach us because we need to learn the English language and not about the language" (p.24). Only by looking at classroom processes, how the teachers address the individual needs, and what their perceptions are will we have a knowledge base from which we can begin to increase our awareness of some issues that need to be dealt with in language teaching.

In a study which investigated the cultural awareness of ESL teachers, Gnida (1991) stated that "although the teachers appreciated that their students' expectations differed from their own, they did not generally feel that, as teachers, they should change their behavior in order to fulfill their students' expectations. One reason for this is that teachers felt that, by insisting that students change, they were preparing them for the expectations society would place on them once they left the classroom" (p.103). Instead, the instructors Gnida studied introduced the differences as a topic for discussion, and prefaced activities with a discussion of the learning objectives. This study strove to hear how teachers feel this influences the classroom processes, and discover other strategies used by

instructors to help students adjust to the different styles, and to make students feel welcome and equal in participation.

## Delimitations

This research will investigate low proficiency ESL classes in which oral participation is emphasized. Only four classrooms will be included in the study.

The instructors shall be purposively, not randomly, selected in order to obtain informants who have considerable teaching experience, and are willing to share this experience.

The four student characteristics to be studied, i.e., culture, gender, age and educational background, were selected because these are the features most frequently cited in the literature that deal with individual difference. Issues such as sexual orientation, height, weight, etc. were not studied, for two reasons. In part, the study was limited to the four characteristics because of the need to manage the data. Second, these questions are more personal, thus were not asked due to sensitivity of student feelings.

## Limitations

In all social science research of this type there is the possibility of researcher bias.

The classrooms and instructors were purposefully selected, and the students were asked to volunteer to participate in the interviews, which limits the generalizability of the study. However, descriptions of the classrooms and instructor backgrounds are included to enable the reader to identify the typicalness of this context, and determine how the data relate to their experience.

The researcher's presence could influence the natural process of the classroom, as well as the statements made by the informants. Informants may provide responses that express what the informant believes the researcher is looking for.

## Assumptions

For the purpose of this study, it is assumed that classroom interaction is affected by student characteristics.

It is assumed that informants will provide accurate and explicit information, as best as their language and memory abilities allow.

## Definition of Terms

**Culture** -- Culture is a term which is extremely difficult to define precisely because of the complex interrelationship of factors that constitute it. Ovando and Collier (1985) state that "such vagueness, however, can be useful. Culture is a deep, multilayered, somewhat cohesive hodgepodge of language, values, beliefs, and behaviors that pervades every aspect of every person's life, and it is continually undergoing minor--and occasionally major--alterations. When it is studied, it becomes an abstraction--albeit a useful one--for giving meaning to human activity. What it is *not* is an isolated, mechanical aspect of life which can be used to directly explain phenomenon in a multiethnic classroom, or which can be learned as a series of facts" (p.101).

**Ethnicity** -- refers to the country or place of origin of a person.

Because ethnicity and culture are often used synonymously, the difference in meaning is often overlooked. This is due, in part, to the fact that ethnicity is seen as the main factor determining cultural groups. Both appear in this thesis, often used interchangeably. There may appear to be confusion at times, for when I asked questions relating to culture the answers often related to country of origin. Although it is not accurate, because this is the usage of the participants, it is so expressed in the thesis.

**Gender** -- the characteristics people display or are expected to display, associated with one's biologically determined sex. For the sake of simplicity,

only male and female sexes are identified in this thesis, with a wide spectrum of masculine and feminine behaviours.

**Interaction** -- refers to actual, active communication between the teacher and student(s) or among students. Verbal and non-verbal communication are both aspects of interaction. Interaction is two-way communication.

**Participation** -- refers to students' involvement in the classroom activities. There may be times when a student is engaged in the lesson, but is not interacting directly with anyone. Participation can include non-interactive (one-way) activities (e.g., reading; listening to mini lectures) as well as two-way activities. Interaction is a subset of participation.

**NS** -- Native Speaker,

**NNS** -- Non-Native Speaker

**L2** -- Second Language

## Summary

The intent of this research was to examine how the background and characteristics of the student, with particular reference to gender, age, ethnicity, and educational background, influences classroom participation. The next two chapters will provide a review of the relevant literature and a description of the research procedures. Chapter four presents the analysis of the data and the research findings from the student interviews. Chapter five provides the findings of the instructor interviews. The final chapter contains a summary of the research, implications for practice, recommendations for future research, and personal reflections.

# Chapter II

# REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

## Introduction

The influence of gender, culture and educational background on educational opportunity has been examined increasingly in recent decades. These factors may affect the participation and atmosphere in a classroom in ways that may provide disproportionate advantages to certain members of the class. This chapter provides a review of research in the areas of gender, culture and educational background in relation to education, followed by a discussion of the importance of interaction in second language learning and some ideas from the literature.

## Culture

Culture pervades most aspects of daily life; it is therefore important to recognize the influence that cultural differences may have on both learning and teaching. In an ESL classroom, the task of the teacher is extremely difficult because of the multicultural population that usually constitutes the class. Archer (1986) says that

> stories universally recognized by members of the TESL profession pertain to the student who inevitably comes late, interrupting the class while entering; the student who promises daily to bring her paper 'tomorrow'; the shy student who refuses to participate despite the teacher's best efforts; and, of course, the student who talks incessantly during class (p.170).

Some of these characteristics can be linked to socialization patterns (for instance those based on culture or gender), which then carry over into the classroom. Differences in the classroom may be problematic for both the instructors and students.

Perceptions of the role of the teacher and student vary across cultures. In Canada, students are commonly expected to be actively involved in their education, taking responsibility for much of their own learning. While some other cultures may share the value of participatory learning, others may believe that students should be passive recipients of learning and that teachers should have an authoritarian role, deserving of a high degree of respect: "This can lead to misunderstanding on both sides in an ESL class, when the teacher expects or demands active student participation from passive learners" (Gnida, p.11). The instructors in Gnida's study of cultural influences in ESL classrooms "seemed to expect their students to adapt to the 'Canadian' classroom expectations" (p.100) and to take responsibility for their own learning, because society expects them to take the initiative to perform their civic, employment, and familial duties. Whether or not students understand this rationale, culturally determined role expectations may well influence the nature and amount students are willing to participate in the classroom.

Students' and instructors' divergent perceptions of the appropriateness of learning activities is discussed by Nunan (1989). He points out that "there is anecdotal evidence to suggest that learners are more immediately concerned with the appropriacy of learning processes than with learning content" (p.177). Nunan discusses the results of a study conducted in 1985 by Willing of over five hundred ESL learners in Australia. This study found that, although individual variations existed,

> there were certain activities which seemed to be almost universally popular. These included pronunciation practice, explanations to the class, conversation practice, error correction and vocabulary development. Unpopular activities included listening to and using cassettes, student self-discovery of error, using pictures, films and video, pair work, and language games. (Nunan, p. 179)

Nunan, after conducting his own study of learners' and teachers' views of priorities in the language classroom, affirmed that "while teachers seem to accept

the value of communicatively oriented activities, the learners surveyed place greater value on 'traditional' learning activities" (p.179). The mismatch between the perceptions of the teacher and learner could result in misunderstandings and difficulties while attempting to set up communicative activities (see, for example, Nunan, 1989).

The differences in the expectations of the learning process may be difficult to overcome. For instance, an EFL instructor who taught Chinese students in Beijing stated that he wondered why students had such an "overwhelming resistance to non-traditional styles" (Oxford, 1992, p.449). He suggested that it may be due to the selection process of the universities which would screen out anyone who does not conform to traditional styles, or "perhaps the years of experience in a restricted set of strategies had trained students to learn best in these modes" (p.449). One of the main difficulties was that students could not, regardless of the attempts of the instructor, see non-traditional activities as learning, but rather saw them as play and a waste of time.

Other difficulties include the possibility that cliques will form, causing unhealthy competition, or stereotyping between different cultural groups in classes. One way to address these problems is by including discussions of cultural relativity as part of the course content (McLeod, 1980). Cultural relativity encourages one to look at cultures as different from, not superior or inferior to, one another. This also assists in counteracting some of the tendencies to stereotype, by demonstrating differences between and within cultures. It is impossible to say that all members of any one cultural group will follow exactly the same patterns of behaviour; however, certain traits are more likely to appear among members of that group. Nonetheless, cultural relativity is "easier to talk about than to practice in the classroom, especially when members of cultural groups subscribe to beliefs, values, or behaviors which run counter to those prescribed for traditional educational settings" (Ovando & Collier, 1985, p.120). Although it is difficult to practice, a lack of understanding of cultural relativity could make it difficult to achieve an atmosphere of tolerance and cooperation in the classroom.

One of the extreme difficulties is that most of what constitutes culture is developed without conscious analysis. As Ovando & Collier (1985) state, "after we are fully developed cognitively, therefore, we may still be captive to beliefs,

values and behaviors which have been unconsciously and uncritically internalized" (p. 128-129). Therefore, defining our own cultural traits often becomes complicated because people do not generally consciously analyze their own behaviour patterns. Nonetheless, it is necessary to address the probability that differences will exist and may affect participation in classrooms. Furthermore, Friesen (1993) suggests that teachers should strive to recognize their own cultural beliefs, for "unresolved personal cultural baggage can have dysfunctional effects on the teaching-learning process when culturally affected behaviours come into play" (p. 93). Cross cultural studies, including those of the host culture, is one possible way to raise the awareness of the instructors.

As stated in the introduction, it is also important to recognize the relationship between culture and language: "Culture is really an integral part of the interaction between language and thought. Cultural patterns, customs, and ways of life are expressed in language; culture-specific world views are reflected in language" (Brown, 1986, p.45). Because both culture and language develop without much conscious analysis, the influence of one on the other is difficult to perceive. As a result, students often "assume that the new words they are learning can be 'plugged in' to existing syntactic structures" (Mantle-Bromley, 1992, p.117) from their own first language. Misunderstandings could result, especially if direct translation from one language to another is used. Teachers have struggled to encourage students to overcome the belief that direct translation is possible, discussing the differences in sentence construction, nuances of words, and intonation. Nonetheless, Mantle-Bromley states that many instructors believe that the "new cultural patterns can be fitted into their students' existing cultural framework" (p.117), without realizing that neither culture nor language can be directly translated. Mantle-Bromley contends that although instructors realize that culture can influence language, and that acceptance of cultural differences is necessary for language learning,

> they are not entirely clear about how much attention must be paid to students' cultural patterns, about how much preparation must be done before students can accept the phenomena of a foreign culture. Teachers, then, not only need to help students revise their *linguistic* patterns, they likewise need to help students revise their *cultural* patterns. (p.117)

It would therefore be interesting to examine the instructor's perceptions of this, and to see how they deal with the interrelationship of culture and language in their lessons.

## Gender

Over the past few decades the issues of gender and education have been recognized as important areas of study in relation to equality and equity. Many studies have examined the implications of gender bias in the classroom, especially in relation to the future repercussions on students' achievements. Differences in relation to the educational opportunities for male and female students have been recognized in the education of students from kindergarten to grade 12, as well as with adults.

Gender differences have been identified in three main areas within the classroom: language, materials, and classroom processes, which will be discussed below (e.g., Sunderland, 1992; Holmes, 1987; Baldwin & Baldwin, 1992). The first area involves the sexist aspects of the English language, such as the use of exclusive language, including the generic male pronoun, and the use of words referring to (and about) women in a derogatory fashion. Currently, steps are being taken to increase the use of gender inclusive language, with varied results. Second, concern is that classroom materials, including grammar texts, dictionaries, course textbooks, handouts, videos, etc., have a sexist bias. Many texts were found to portray male characters more frequently, and in a wider variety of activities than women, with very few non-Caucasian characters. Furthermore, many of the illustrations or examples portray women in stereotypical roles or with negative connotations. Current analyses have also looked at the extent to which the male bias in the literature has been reduced. As Baldwin and Baldwin (1992) point out, despite the growing awareness of sexism in textbooks, the success of efforts to remedy the situation has been limited. The third area, classroom processes, includes the learning activities, learning styles and strategies, discipline and feedback, teacher-student and student-student interaction, which may reveal differential patterns based on gender. Although all forms of gender bias deserve attention, the focus here shall be to examine how the participation in classroom processes may differ due to the gender of the students.

Studies of classroom processes have shown bias in favor of males in both participation and atmosphere (Sadker & Sadker 1990, 1994; Laube-Barnes, 1990; Gaskell & McLaren, 1987). The examination of gender bias is a relatively recent phenomenon, however, and Gaskell and McLaren point out that the perception of the advantaged group has changed over time. Sex role socialization had been seen as an acceptable, if not desirable, aspect of formal education until the early 1970's. Prior to the seventies, boys were seen to be the disadvantaged students because of their lower reading ability: "Teachers were encouraged to use books which represented the world of little boys, in an attempt to cater to their needs in the classroom" (p.7). This perception changed with the advent of feminist social sciences, which stated that the encouragement of "sex-appropriate" behaviours had negative consequences for female students. While boys were encouraged to be independent, aggressive, and competitive, girls were encouraged to be dependent, passive, and compliant. In addition, teachers often thought females were intellectually inferior, thus limiting the possibilities of female students by having lower expectations of them (Greenglass, 1973).

These 'sex-appropriate' behaviours may translate into different participation patterns in the classroom. Aries (1976) studied the interaction patterns and discussion content of six experimental groups of undergraduate university students. There were two all-male, two all-female, and two mixed-sex groups of five to seven people, all of which demonstrated interesting patterns of interaction with different topics of discussion. In the all-male groups, the same males were dominant in each meeting, and the rank-order of active to passive speakers remained constant. Contrarily, in the all-female groups, the women appeared to share speaking time, and attempted to draw out the quieter members. In the mixed-sex groups, the males became less competitive and spoke more of their feelings, but still the overall participation was to the disadvantage of women. In the mixed groups, women initiated only 34% of total interaction and were more restricted in their style of discourse, as opposed to men, whose styles were allowed to vary more. Aries discovered that

> over time the women were most interested in the all-female group, and looked forward to those sessions more than to the mixed group sessions. The males over time looked forward to the mixed group sessions, and were less interested in attending the all-male group sessions. (p. 16)

The participants in the study were white, middle-class college students, and therefore may not necessarily reflect the patterns of all male/female group interaction.

Holmes (1991) and Kelly (1991) also found that men tend to dominate conversation in mixed-sex classes. This tendency has been related to gender-based styles of interaction, for men's interaction is based on power, while women's are based on solidarity and support. Kelly conducted a study with males and females in a training course for adults, in which she found gender differences in the quantity of participation of the members. Although the size of the group was relatively small, only ten members, distinct patterns were observable. Overall, men spoke for considerably longer than the women: "during the first lessons, the women were outnumbered by the men nearly 2:1 and this could be responsible for their reticence in speaking. However, during the last lesson there were two men and two women present, and still the men spoke for more than twice the amount of time" (Kelly, 1991, p.139). Aside from controlling the conversation by initiating more often than women, there were also occasions when the men actually dismissed the input made by the women either by ignoring it or by making abrupt topic changes. Interestingly, however, not all men were dominant, and some spoke even less than the women. Nonetheless, these differences in speech behaviours in classes could mean fewer opportunities for females to interact in second language classes which include males.

Researchers (e.g., Spender, 1982; Sadker and Sadker, 1990; 1994; Sunderland, 1992) have found that both male and female teachers, unknowingly, interacted with males more often than with females. The imbalance in interaction is not simple to counteract, because, as mentioned in the introduction, instructors are often not aware that gender biases exist in their classrooms. Even when instructors consciously attempt to counteract gender bias, males may still receive the majority of interaction. Spender (1982) states that while she attempted to balance the interaction in her classes between males and females, she felt she was spending too much time with the female students. After the class, she discovered that in spite of feeling that she had spent too much time with the females, only an average 38 percent of the interaction was with them. Thus, our perceptions of the participation levels in the class may not reflect the actual amount.

Males have been found to have an advantage in the nature as well as quantity of interaction. Feedback plays an important role in learning because it provides cues to students about any modifications they may need to make on what they have said, or reinforcement that what they have said is correct. Sadker and Sadker (1990) found that in a college classroom males not only received the majority of all forms of teacher feedback in class, identified as criticism, praise, remediation, and acceptance, but they also received the most valuable feedback. The majority of the feedback used by instructors is acceptance, a non-evaluative form of feedback, which is diffuse and imprecise (e.g., uh-huh, okay, yes). Sadker and Sadker point out that although males receive a greater amount of all forms of feedback, the difference is greater between males and females for criticism, praise, and remediation, which carry more precise learning information for the student. Further differences were found in relation to the explanation of academic difficulties. Male students' low achievement levels were attributed to lack of effort and high achievement to natural ability; this was rarely the case with female students whose high achievement levels were attributed to effort, but low achievement to lack of ability. For female students, who "enter school at a higher achievement level and leave at a lower achievement level" (p.180), differences must exist somewhere in the educational system that disadvantage women.

If the quality or quantity of interaction between men and women differs within the ESL classroom, Holmes (1989) is concerned that the opportunities for language acquisition for women may be jeopardized. She states that "if men are dominating the talking time the women are not getting the speaking opportunities they need. They may be developing their comprehension ability but their production skills are likely to be impeded" (p.15). Thus it appears that gender bias may be an issue for ESL teachers. Sunderland (1992) points out an interesting contradiction in that "while some education folklore claims that females are the better learners, . . . research into classroom processes, materials and the English language itself suggests females to be at least potentially *dis*advantaged" (p.89). If opportunities for interaction, which is deemed essential for language acquisition, are lacking, there may be a major obstruction to female language learners in mixed-sex classrooms. This will be discussed further in the literature review under classroom participation.

Differences between male and female communication patterns have implications for native and non-native speaker interaction. Pica, Berducci, Holiday, Lewis, and Newman (1990) studied whether "when learners engage in L2 interaction, are their opportunities to comprehend and produce the L2 conditioned by their gender and that of their interlocutor?" (p.3). Same-sex and mixed-sex pairs of non-native and native English speakers performed three communication tasks, in which control of the information rested with one member of the pair. The interaction was analyzed for the amount and nature of the negotiation which took place between the native (NS) and non-native speakers (NNS). Although the gender of the non-native speaker did not significantly influence the amount or nature of interaction as expected, the gender of the native speakers did. The gender of the NS affected the production of and response to language negotiation signals. Language negotiation signals include questions, statements, phrases or words that repeated what the interlocutor said, either mixed-up or unchanged, and signaled the need for further information or clarification. Overall, the experiment had three main findings: 1) female NNSs gave more signals to female NSs than to male NSs, but male NNSs did not differ in the amount of signals to male and female NNSs; 2) female NSs produced significantly more signals than male NSs; and 3) male NSs - female NNSs dyads showed less negotiation than the other cross-sex, and same sex pairs. This study revealed that "the pairing of learners with interlocutors of same or opposite gender conditioned both the number of opportunities and degree of success that male learners achieved in modifying their production compared with female learners" (p.57). This study was conducted in an experimental environment, including only American speakers of English and Japanese non-native speakers. For this reason the study may have been strongly influenced by cultural gender socialization which would not transfer to other cultural groups. Furthermore, because this was an experimental study, it is not clear whether these interaction patterns would occur in a classroom environment.

Gender behaviour is influenced by culture. Within each culture there are expectations, attitudes, and values relating to people's gender. Although gendered behaviour may be enforced by family and other institutions, it is not constant but flows on a continuum from masculine to feminine: "Outsiders to a culture may expect masculine or feminine behavior of a group to conform to

stereotyped notions. If these notions appear to be in conflict with the predominant values expressed in the school, one may expect problems to arise" (Ovando & Collier, 1985, p.122). Because gender is constructed within cultural boundaries, acceptable male or female behaviour in one culture may be unacceptable in another. If males or females behave in ways that are acceptable in their home culture, but not in the new culture, a great number of misunderstandings could result. In mainstream classes of both children and adults, women "who display behaviour and have attitudes that are generally upheld as inappropriate for females risk conflict with teachers and the school generally" (Robinson, 1992, p.285). Although one does not normally associate the use of discipline with adult learners -- because adults are usually treated with more respect and less formally than youths -- Robinson states that disciplinary behaviour was used with students who did not conform to the expected gender role, regardless of age. Robinson also points out that female students were either ignored or received negative feedback for behaviour which is accepted, or expected, from male students. For instance, for teachers to engage "in power battles with male students, particularly older students, was often regarded as 'normal' male behaviour .... However, to be challenged by a young woman, who should be passive and subservient by the standards of our society generally" (p.280) was viewed by the teachers as being an indication of a personal problem of the female involved.

The influence of gender in the classroom, as discussed above, can have implications on the level of language acquisition in the language classroom. Classroom participation may be influenced by culture and gender, but these are just two of the factors which will be examined. Another factor that can influence interaction in the classroom is educational background, to be discussed next.

## Educational Background

The effect of educational background on learning opportunities is deceptively obvious. Previous education provides the basis of literacy, study skills, and other knowledge that will assist students in further learning activities. Weismantel and Fradd (1989) state that "students from diverse language and cultural backgrounds differ in many ways. Some have had little preparation for school. Others have had extensive training in private schools and are from

families in which educational achievement is the highest value" (p. 5). This can make simultaneous progression amongst students and collective goals difficult to attain.

Literacy is an important issue in many ESL classes, because written text is a prevalent classroom material. English speaking societies are predominantly text-based, which implies a different form of information dissemination than oral societies. The definition of status alters when an oral society becomes literate, due to the fact that information that was formally transmitted by the essential sage becomes accessible to all. This challenges the foundation of the culture, especially when the relationship between language and culture is considered. Kaplan (1986) warns that the "introduction of literacy into a previously oral culture needs to be done under controlled conditions such that the change over from an orate to a literate information system does not destabilize the society" (p.17). Similarly, one may also surmise that any individual moving from an oral culture may feel disoriented as they move to Canada where they may not easily comprehend the literate culture or the language system. Instructors should understand the difficulties faced by such individuals in the ESL classroom. Because literacy is linked to schooling, those students who are from literate cultures are more likely to be better prepared to enter a language classroom which emphasizes text-based learning than those who are not.

Education level is currently the major indicator of social position (Hurn, 1993). Many studies have been conducted to examine the relationship between social status and academic achievement, and "in every country for which we have data, low-status students continue to fare less well in school than more privileged students, whether we use test scores, IQ tests, grades, or years of school completed as our criterion of success" (p.17). This continues, in spite of the increased access to education, and thus there appears to be a selective advantage to certain students within the educational process.

As was discussed in relation to culture, the educational experience of students in their countries of origin may influence their learning style preferences and degree of participation in classes (Gnida, 1990). Gnida points out that students may not perceive the value of educational activities that do not resemble those they have experienced previously. The different expectations of the teachers and students should be addressed to compensate for the distinct

backgrounds. One way some participants in Gnida's study dealt with possible conflicts was to spend "a lot of time explaining to the students exactly WHY they were doing what they were doing, thereby making the language objectives of the various activities quite clear" (p.106).

In a study conducted by Oxford (1991, 1992, 1993), style conflicts between students and instructors were found to be based, at least in part, on cultural differences. One doctoral student who was studying communications stated that due to her previous learning experience in Korea she had difficulties adapting to the activities in the classroom taught by an American instructor. She had a strong visual learning preference, "mainly due to [her] previous learning experiences in Korea . . . where most teachers emphasize learning through reading and tend to pour a great deal of information on the chalkboard" (Oxford, 1992, p.447). Because of the difference between her background and the classroom environment, she admits

> [she]often skipped the required group activities. Frankly, [she] did not enjoy the class at all. In the classroom [she] had often been anxious because [she] didn't want to be called to be a demonstrator in front of the whole class. (p. 447)

She also acknowledged that she probably did not learn as much as she could have if she had been accustomed to the kinds of activities present in the class.

The knowledge the students brings into the class can greatly affect their attitudes and involvement in the classroom. A student in a study conducted at an ESL class in Edmonton stated that she had already learned Polish and French in Poland, and her "understanding of grammar in Polish and in French helped [her] to learn English grammar. [She has] learned English very quickly thanks to the educational training [she] received at university in Poland" (Laberge, 1992, p.24). She did not enjoy grammatical explanations in class, and thought grammar was irrelevant, although other members of the class did not all have previous grammar knowledge, and mentioned that they felt that grammatical explanations were essential for their language development.

## Classroom Participation

The relationship between interaction and language acquisition is the primary area of investigation in the field of second language acquisition. An increasing number of studies deal with the importance of the linguistic environment for language learning.

Krashen (1980) put forward the Monitor Theory, which included the Input and the Affective Filter Hypotheses. The Affective Filter Hypothesis deals with the emotional aspects of language learning. Krashen proposed that learners need to be relaxed and free from anxiety in order to learn a language. The filter moves up or down depending on the emotional state of the learner; when the filter is up (anxiety), Krashen hypothesized, language learning will be limited. According to Krashen, the atmosphere for language learning is extremely important, and classrooms should be stress-free and comfortable. The second aspect of the theory, the Input Hypothesis, states that language learners require only exposure to comprehensible (simplified) input to acquire a second language, and that they need not speak. Comprehensible input is defined as language which is at a level that a student can understand and assimilate, but which is just beyond the students' current proficiency level, that is, *i+1;* this means it is at the learner's level of understanding, and a little beyond. The *i+1* construct, however, is impossible to operationalize. Krashen's theory brought on much discussion in the field of second language learning, but was challenged primarily on the grounds that it is unfalsifiable.

The claim that learners do not need to speak in order to acquire a second language was challenged by other authors who state that comprehensible input is necessary, but not sufficient for language learning. Long (1985), for instance, states that interaction is necessary for language acquisition because it provides the opportunity for the nonnative speaker to signal the need for speech modifications, so that any necessary linguistic or conversational adjustments may be made to ensure comprehensibility of input. Modifications of input (including repetition, paraphrase, confirmation checks, clarification requests, or expansions) facilitate comprehension, although some may be syntactically more complex. Because these adjustments occur solely in the context of conversation between a

NS and NNS, passive recipients of input would not have the advantage of triggering interactional adjustments to assist in their language learning.

Swain (1985) has also suggested an argument for the need for learners to produce language. Swain compared the language ability of grade six French immersion students who receive second language input almost exclusively from the teacher and nonnative speaking peers with that of native speakers. The study included a test battery of oral production, written production and grammar multiple-choice tasks, which both French immersion and French native speaking students wrote and the results were compared. In spite of the great amount of comprehensible input that had been provided to the students over the course of six years, the immersion students' linguistic level did not reach that of native speaking students. Swain therefore argues that "comprehensible input is crucial to grammatical acquisition, *not* because the focus is on meaning, *or* because a two-way exchange is occurring, but because by being understood - by its match with the learner's ongoing intentions and cognitions - it permits the learner to focus on form" (p. 248), but that students also need to produce output which "may force the learner to move from semantic processing to syntactic processing" (p.249). One of the necessary elements of interaction which forces the language learners to analyze their output is the use of negative input: "Negative input is feedback to the learner which indicates that his or her output has been unsuccessful in some way. Negative input includes, for example, explicit corrections, confirmation checks, and clarification checks" (Swain, 1985, p. 245), or the interactional modifications of the type Long (1985) discusses. Correction encourages the students to produce accurate expressions, and thus improves the understanding and use of the second language.

## Role of the Teacher

The role of the teacher in orchestrating the classroom is crucial, albeit difficult. Courses for teaching ESL emphasize theory, applied linguistics and in-class practice teaching, but "little in the way of intercultural training" (Dunnett, Dubin and Lezberg, 1986, p. 158). Furthermore, many materials contain cultural bias, and "it is up to the teacher to alter materials to express a two-dimensional or multi-dimensional outlook" (p. 153). Without cross-cultural training this may be an overwhelming task.

Gnida (1991) points out that "if there is no sensitivity on the part of the teacher toward the cultural differences of his or her students, the literature suggests that there will be no communication between them, and therefore no teaching or learning will occur in the class" (p.10). Understanding culture in second language learning is considered crucial because language and culture are inextricably linked, and when the population of learners is multicultural the situation becomes extremely complex. However, even when the best attempts are made by the instructor to be culturally aware and to treat students in an equitable fashion, this is not as easy as it seems. Mac an Ghaill (1993) found that although instructors may strive to be open-minded, categorizing of students based on their cultural backgrounds does occur. One teacher interviewed stated, "I mean I do try and consciously try to treat them all the same, but to you, I suppose, unconsciously I label kids and react in certain ways, different ways to different kids" (p.150). So although the instructor was consciously trying to treat all students equitably, his own socialization and expectations influenced his behaviour. Without awareness of the situation, this pattern may have continued unchecked.

Instructors' perceptions of their students and their abilities can greatly influence the kind of participation they undertake with students. Schinke-Llano (1983) examined the nature of modifications addressed to second language learners in a classroom of ESL and native speaking students in all-English-content classes. This study focused on classroom observations to determine the number of interactions between the teachers and ESL and NS students. Schinke-Llano found that the ESL students received less input overall from the teachers. In addition, she found qualitative differences in the nature of input addressed to the NS and ESL students: "It appears that with respect to interaction length, the more complex the functional type, or rather the more important the functional type to the content of the lesson, the larger the difference in treatment between [ESL] students and non-[ESL] students" (1983, p.155)[2]. Given that interaction and conversational adjustments are important for second language acquisition, differences in opportunities for interaction may affect the rate of participation

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[2] Although Schinke-Llano uses the term limited-English-proficiency (LEP) in her study, for the ease of reading, ESL shall be used in this review. References made here shall assume a low level of English proficiency, unless otherwise stated.

and, indirectly, the learning of ESL students. Interestingly, the attitude of the teachers in Schinke-Llano's study towards the ESL students, and their perception of the inability of the students to comprehend and participate appeared to contribute to the differences, despite the lack of evidence to substantiate these beliefs.

## Addressing Diversity

Brooks (1986) proposes using vignettes at the start of each class to introduce various cultural aspects of society that could be discussed in relation to persons in the typical age and social group of the language learners. Some examples of these incidental talks could be: camping and hiking, traffic, snacks, cleanliness, pets, etc. "The focal point of the presentation of culture in all its meanings should be the view of life as seen from within the stances comparable to those of the student" (p.128). This may not be easy in a heterogeneous class for not every single distinction in cultural behaviours can be covered in such a simplistic fashion.

Openly discussing cultural differences in the classroom is one way that problems may be avoided. This could be achieved in the classroom by making the learning objectives of activities explicit. One teacher involved in Gnida's study (1990) pointed out that "she felt these explanations were important to avoid disappointing those students whose expectations differed from her own" (p.106). In this way students with distinct language learning backgrounds may participate more freely if they all see the utility of a task.

## Summary

As seen here, there are many ways in which students' backgrounds and individual characteristics can influence their participation in the classroom, and thus their learning opportunity. The instructor plays an important role in addressing the individual differences and in orchestrating the participation. The following chapter will provide a description of the methodology which was utilized in examining the issue of diversity in the classroom.

# Chapter III

# METHODOLOGY

## Introduction

This study examined how the ethnicity, gender, age, and educational background of ESL students are manifested in the participation patterns of the classroom and how teachers and students perceive and respond to the differential participation. The study included four oral ESL classes with low English proficiency students. First, I observed four hours of each class and took field notes. Then the four teachers and some students from each class were interviewed, using questions based on the observation notes, as well as issues raised in the literature dealing with student characteristics and participation.

A broad investigation of the classroom environment was undertaken, using a case-study approach. Gay (1992) states that "the primary purpose of a case study is to determine the factors, and relationships among the factors, that have resulted in the current behavior or status of the subject of the study" (p.236). The myriad characteristics of the students in an ESL class interact in a complex fashion, requiring a study that encompasses the diverse behaviours of students and teachers, and which can accommodate unexpected data that may arise during the course of the study.

A case study approach is appropriate for the following reasons. A case study can incorporate information on a variety of levels. The behaviours in the classroom are influenced by the students' individual histories and as such, they lend themselves to investigation on an individual basis. In other words, learning is not determined only by what occurs within the four walls of the classroom. Furthermore, instructors' perceptions are influenced not only by the

characteristics of current students, but also by their experiences in previous classes.

The selection of specific locations or subjects for study precludes acquiring a representative sample; however , Best and Kahn (1989) state that "the selection of the subject of the case study needs to be done carefully in order to assure that he or she is typical of those to whom we wish to generalize" (p.92). The credibility of a study is related, at least in part, to whether or not the context is considered to be atypical (Patton, 1980). Similarly, Best and Kahn (1989) contend that the "element of typicalness, rather than uniqueness, is the focus of attention for an emphasis upon uniqueness would preclude scientific abstraction and generalization of findings" (p.92). Although no individual situation is perfectly representative of all others, study sites that are carefully selected should reflect common issues, and can be enhanced through the use of rich description of the context, and findings can be transferred to other situations. Traditionally, statistical generalization is only possible when a representative sample is included in a study. A useful distinction is presented by Guba and Lincoln (1982) who differentiate between the transferability and generalizability of research findings. Generalizability refers to the degree to which the "data have been collected from a sample that is in some way (randomized, stratified, etc.) representative of the population to which generalization is sought" (p.247), while transferability refers to the degree "working hypotheses from that context might be transferable to a second and similar context" (p.248) through the use of purposive sampling and thick description. Therefore, in this study, reference shall be made to transferability, and not generalizability.

A case study, according to Best and Kahn (1989), examines "a social unit as a whole. The unit may be a person, a family, a social group, a social institution, or a community... The case study probes deeply and analyzes interactions between the factors that explain present status or that influence growth" (p.92). The cases under examination here are four heterogeneous ESL classes with low level proficiency from one adult education institution. Both male and female instructors participated in the study. Oral classes, where participation is emphasized, were observed. Classes which do not place importance on interaction, such as composition classes, were not included.

The location for this study was selected for several reasons. First, the institution chosen has a large ESL program which includes several classes at various levels of proficiency. Second, most of the instructors at this institution have had many years of experience teaching ESL. Finally, the ability to observe classes at one institution held a logistical advantage.

Although many studies have been conducted to examine the relationship between culture, gender, educational background, or age with academic achievement and linguistic interaction, few have looked at the variety of factors together, or for patterns in classroom participation. This research was an exploratory study. It did not attempt to prove or disprove a set of hypotheses about participation patterns, but rather aimed to obtain a deeper understanding of the intricate system within four classrooms of students from diverse backgrounds. The information obtained from this study provides a foundation upon which further research may be based.

## Data Collection

The study began with some informal observations of the four participating classes. First, detailed field notes were taken, describing the context, the classroom processes and the participants. Classroom activities and the salient participation patterns were noted. This information was then used to develop some initial questions for the interviews. The observations enabled comparisons with the data from the interviews as a means of triangulation during the analysis stage of the research. The interviews were audio-taped, but the classrooms were neither audio- or video-taped.

Both teachers and students were observed and interviewed, in order "to discover all the variables that are important in the history or development of the subject" (Ary et al., 1990, p.451). Each classroom was observed on four separate occasions for a minimum of an hour at a time. Sometimes I sat off to the side and watched and took notes of the classroom, while on other occassions I was asked to participate in the activities, writing notes following the class. The classes lasted for ten weeks, and the study began after the class had begun, which gave the instructors and students an opportunity to feel comfortable before I entered

the classroom. The research lasted eight weeks and ended at the same time as the classes.

Due to the wide range of student characteristics, it was necessary to talk with as many students in each class as possible. The selection of certain students who demonstrated specific characteristics might have unnecessarily excluded information that was illuminating. Experienced teachers were selected for the study, because they have an extensive knowledge base from which they can respond. It was assumed that although instructors are not aware of every aspect of participation in the classroom, experienced instructors are more likely to have reflected on the nature of interaction in the classroom.

Interviews with the teachers were held following initial observations. The interviews were semi-structured, using information from the literature search and classroom observations to develop some preliminary, general questions. The opening questions elicited descriptions about the classroom environment and the experience of language teaching. After the initial framework was set, more specific questions that focused on particular aspects of the situation were asked. Every attempt was made to use questions that did not lead the informant in any way. It was necessary to ensure that the participants felt comfortable expressing their thoughts, which was accomplished in part by ensuring anonymity and confidentiality. Informants were also provided with a choice of locations for the interviews, to make them as comfortable as possible and free to speak their minds.

Interviews with students were held with students over the eight weeks I was at the school. Students were invited to meet with me when it was convenient for them; interviews were scheduled before school, during class, at lunch, and after school. As stated above, to gain a broad picture of the individual perceptions of the students as many students were included in the study as possible. The process of questioning resembled that used with the instructors. Questions were developed from the initial observations, together with the information from the interviews with the instructors. The first set of questions asked for general information, such as the history of the person, past learning experiences and overall feelings about the course. Subsequent questions were increasingly specific, focusing on salient issues or unclear statements, using

probes and requests for elaboration. As with the instructors, all attempts were made to make the students feel safe in expressing their views.

Following the initial interviews, observations, and interviews with students, follow-up interviews were held with the instructors. They were given the transcripts of the initial interviews, so that they had time to read and reflect upon what they had previously said before the second set of interviews. This allowed the participants to comment on accuracy and provided the opportunity for elaboration. This revision of the earlier data will be performed to obtain more detailed information, as well as to check on the accuracy of the analysis, that may have been influenced by any biases of the researcher.

Throughout the study I kept a journal. Using a journal allowed me to recall specific incidents at later times during the research, which may otherwise have been forgotten. This proved useful in the data analysis for several reasons. It provided information on how my perceptions may have influenced the analysis of the findings; it also supplied accounts of events that occurred during the study that could be used later as examples. Furthermore, it allowed me to see my own learning as it occurred through the process, with the eyes of a novice, rather than trying to remember, after the fact, how I felt about and interpreted any new or unfamiliar situations and events.

## Analysis

The data were analyzed inductively, searching for information arising from the observations and the consequent interviews. Thoughts and images that came to mind during the observation and interview process were recorded. This greatly facilitated the development of categories and themes later. After the interviews were transcribed, the fieldnotes and the transcripts were examined for patterns and recurrent issues. These were then categorized and grouped into themes, and I identified key words. This information was then compiled into individual files, containing the original quotes with the context. After several days, I examined the transcripts again for omissions and to see to what extent the categorization reflected the nature of the data. Consistent and contradictory statements, between the teachers and among students, were also grouped and examined in relationship to one another.

The responses of the instructors and the students were examined to see whether or not relationships between the age, gender, educational background, and ethnicity of the students and their participation patterns existed. This was done using two methods. First, explicit statements of relationship, either from the instructor or student, were codified. An example could be a student saying that he/she feels inhibited to speak in the ESL classroom because in the educational system in his/her country of origin the students should quietly listen to the information provided by the instructor (see Gnida, 1991). Second, observed patterns of behaviour were examined for relationships between the selected student characteristics and the classroom participation, such as culture and participation patterns.

## Ethical Considerations

Every effort was made to maintain the anonymity of the persons and institution involved in the study. Instructors were provided with a consent form detailing the purpose of the study (see Appendix 1). This form was written in simple English for the ESL students (see Appendix 2). Participants were provided with the opportunity to opt out of the study at any time. As well, the purpose and ethical considerations of the research were explained in the classes with the aid of the instructors to clarify any questions or doubts. Participants were assured that only the researcher (and, only when absolutely necessary, the supervisor) would have access to the raw data, and that all data, collected in print and on tape, would remain secure at all times. Because many ESL students may have fears of persecution based upon their life experience in their country of origin it was important to stress that I am a university student, and that the study was not an evaluation of them, nor would it in any way endanger their well being. Students were informed that the primary focus was on the classroom activities and the teacher to relieve any undue stress which might have influenced interactions. Instructors were also provided with the assurance that this study was an examination of classroom interaction, and that it in no way threatened them. Although the focus was on the behavior of the instructors, it is in an attempt to understand and describe interaction patterns. As previously stated, interview transcripts were provided to the instructors, which allowed the

informants to correct misinterpretations, to restate their position, or to ask that certain information not be included in the final version.

## Methodological Considerations

One weakness of the case study approach, as stated before, is its low level of generalizability, for although case studies provide great depth of information, they are usually lacking in breadth (Ary et al., 1990). The volume of data that can be collected from in-depth investigations through observations and interviews is extremely large, and for this reason case studies are usually restricted to one or a small number of cases. A detailed description of the context, participants and activities promotes the transferability of results, so that the findings can be related to other, similar locations or situations. Furthermore, case studies provide knowledge that can assist in developing hypotheses which can be tested by further investigation, which then may be generalizable. For this reason, a detailed presentation of the process, context, findings, analysis and interpretation have been provided to enable replication and follow-up studies.

## The Context

The study involved the students and instructors of four ESL classes at one school which provided exclusively LINC instruction in Edmonton. Two of the classes were Core E, which are upper beginning level ESL. These two classes were taught by Darrell and Steven. In Darrell's class, there were fifteen students (nine women and six men). Steven's class had seventeen students (twelve women and five men). The other two classes were intermediate levels (I-1 and I-2), and were taught by Carol and Alicia. Carol's class had seventeen students (ten women and seven men) and Alicia's class had fifteen students (ten women and five men). A U-shaped configuration was used in each of the classrooms, with the students sitting around the outside of the tables facing toward the centre of the room. The instructors would normally circulate in the centre of the tables with the blackboard behind them. All of the classrooms had windows on one side and the door on the other.

The study was held in the summer, and it was quite warm. In addition, at the time of the study the curtains were being laundered and there was no way to block the heat radiating in through the windows, which resulted in the rooms becmoming very warm. In Darrell's room, paper was taped to the windows to provide some insulation, although, especially for the pregnant women in the class, the heat was often unbearable. Steven's classroom was in the basement, and was cooler than the other rooms.

I began the study after the course had been in session for two weeks, which provided the instructors and students the opportunity to become comfortable with one another before I entered the classroom. The observations and interviews took place over the remainder of the course, with a short summary being handed out to the students and instructors on the last day of classes. Some students continued studying at this school, while others did not, because they had finished their hours of free LINC instruction or started working.

## Summary

The following chapters present the findings of the research as well as the conclusions of the research. Chapter four presents the insights gained from the interviews with students. Insights from the interviews with instructors are presented in chapter five. Original quotes are used to complement the text and provide the information in the words of the students and instructors. A summary of the findings is included in chapter six, together with a discussion of implications for practice, areas of future research and my personal reflections.

# Chapter IV

## STUDENT VIEWS: Factors influencing participation

### Introduction

Through the interviews with students and instructors, a wealth of data were collected on the manner in which the students' individual characteristics influenced their learning and participation in the ESL classroom . The findings are divided into two chapters, the first chapter includes the information obtained from the student interviews, and the second consists of the information obtained from the instructor interviews. This chapter is subdivided into common topic areas. Pseudonyms were used for all of the participants in the study, and these are attached to each of the citations. The results from students from all four classes are presented together in this chapter. In order to place each student within their classroom, the instructor pseudonyms are also included with each student. In this way, it will be easier to know from which of the four classes each student comes. It may also help provide some further insight to their overall language ability. Darrell and Steven instruct the beginner level, Core E, and Carol and Alicia instruct intermediate levels (I-1 and I-2).

A broad spectrum of topics were discussed by the instructors and students. Students provided their perceptions of the learning and participation in the classroom, in relation to the life experience and personal characteristics of themselves and their fellow students. The volume of data obtained from the 48 student interviews was daunting. Deciding which quote of several to include in the thesis was often a painful process, because others would necessarily be excluded, and a great amount of deliberation preceded each decision.

The student data are divided into four main categories: education, gender, ethnicity, and age. The section on education consists of the following topics: years of schooling, previous language instruction, instruction style, and loss of status. The section on gender deals with the following: Are Men the same as Women?, gendered behaviour in the classroom, pregnancy, and juggling family and school. Ethnicity/culture includes: people are people, pronunciation problems, common tongues, learning about culture, discord due to difference, participation levels, and culturally sensitive topics. Under age were the following topics: age is irrelevant, advantage: youth, oldest and youngest, aged interests, youthfulness, and goals.

## Previous Education

### Years of Schooling

Previous educational experience appeared to play an important role in the students' classroom behaviour and confidence. Those students who had more years of formal education had several advantages over those who had little formal education. Previous formal education provided students with transferable skills, which included knowing how to learn and familiarity with the classroom environment. The positive relationship between the years of schooling and the ease with which students learn becomes apparent when you look at the rapidity with which students progressed from one level of English to another, and the confidence students expressed. Students with little previous formal education appeared to remain in the lower level classes.

In fact, if we look at the students in the different classes, a pattern can be seen. Carol's class was for newly admitted intermediate students, and Alicia's was for continuing students who were at an intermediate level. Steven's class was an upper beginner level, and Darrell's was a lower beginner level. All of the students in Alicia's class had completed high school and many had university degrees. Only a few students in Carol's class had not completed high school and some had completed college or university. One of the students who had not completed grade 12 had studied English in school in Hong Kong, and the other was working here in Canada, and had a higher oral ability, but expressed

frustration with grammar, homework, and writing. Steven's class consisted of a combination of those students who had recently started school or who had already taken several courses. Unfortunately, I did not have the opportunity to speak with everyone to obtain the exact details. Darrell's class had a large number of students with very few years (elementary level) education and who had studied in several courses already, together with students who had completed university and were in their first English class.

In Darrell's class, the lowest level of the four observed, many of the students had little previous education, although some students had university degrees. The contrast between the comfort within the classroom environment, speed of learning, and self-confidence were most apparent in this classroom. For students who have little previous formal education, studying English was difficult. Cara was in her fourth class and still had a low English proficiency. She enjoyed speaking with me and wanted to tell me about her children and her life in Vietnam, but struggled to express her thoughts, especially in relation to the classroom.

Lori: Did you study English in Vietnam?

Cara: No. Vietnamese, I speak Vietnamese. English is difficult.

Lori: What is difficult?

Cara: Reading, writing, listening, speaking, difficult for me.

Lori: What is easy for you?

Cara: No, not easy. (CARA, Darrell)

Another student in Darrell's class, Aurora, had only two years of formal education, and, in spite of having extremely strong oral ability, often expressed frustration with her lack of ability or understanding. Because English is commonly spoken in the Philippines, many people are exposed or have studied English. Aurora, who is from the Philippines spoke English quite fluently, but did not feel confident and was intimidated by the academic side of language study. For many people this may be surprising, because of the existence of

English in her country of origin. Nevertheless, Aurora finds grammar and homework confusing, and often said that she "does not have a brain":

> I think I like all, but sometimes my brain didn't work. I don't think very well. I forgot it. I am listening now, and write, and after that I forgot. What happened to my head? And my husband now and my daughter tease me my homework, because I don't know to do like that. I can read, but the new words, the difficult, the high, I don't understand. (AURORA, Darrell)

In the course of the interview, Aurora explained why she did not attend school in the Philippines. Initially her schooling was interrupted by the war, and when she returned to school at age thirteen her teacher began to pursue her sexually. She subsequently stopped going to school and told her sister to go instead, for she related the advances with her supposed lack of intellectual ability:

> All of my sisters they have gone to school. Just me, I don't like to go to school, because me in 1945 my teacher is a man, he is something ah what do you call that, courting me. "I want to marry you." So I don't like, so I don't like to go to school anymore. I stopped, then my teacher coming to my house, "why don't you go to school?" No, I don't want. I am I think that uh, thirteen years old. Then about eight months, and after that I don't like to go to school. I said to my older sister, "you go to school, I am the one to be helping Mother in the store. You can be the one to go to school, because you have a brain. So I am the one to help our mother. (AURORA, Darrell)

The effects of this experience seem to continue today, for in social events, Aurora says that her husband encourages her to speak, but she can't. She says, "I am ashamed."

Arif, from Carol's class, had only seven years of school, because he took over the responsibilities of the family when his father died. In the interview and in other conversations with me, Arif said he wanted to learn to speak English because his uncle offered to buy him a gas station. While Arif was going to school he was also working, so did not have much time to study or complete his homework. His life had been very fragmented in Turkey, and this trend seemed to continue in his domestic and academic life here in Canada.

> I went to school seven years. When I was young, when seven years, when I learned to speak Turkish I didn't go to school. Then I started

> to learn job, I worked different job, welder, grocery store, some work. I don't know, I don't have regular job. When I finished my school, I wanted to go to some shopping. They taught me welding. I didn't learn too much. I was in welding one or two years, then my father died. Then I went he had a grocery store, I left my job, I went to grocery store. When he died, I went to grocery store, and I worked there 6 or 7 years. Then I went to army, eight months. Then I returned to my city. I start again, salesman, I worked again in the grocery store. And then after two years, I came here... English is too difficult for me. If I learn English, I think my uncle is going to buy gas station, in Canada. If I learned. He said to me "you just learn speak English." He will buy a gas station. I will be there. But English is very difficult. (ARIF, Carol)

Feng, another student in Carol's class who did not complete high school, expressed surprise at being assessed at a lower intermediate level. She had learned a little English before, but she had forgotten much of what she had studied, although she could recall some of the grammar for the placement test. There was a great deal of pride as well as surprise as she spoke of how she was placed in the intermediate level having only eight years of formal education.

> I learned a little bit English in my country and I am 40 years old, so I forget all the things to speak English because in Hong Kong I don't need to speak English. No need to speak. Only Cantonese. I learned English when I was a child in school, I have not very high to school. About grade 10 maybe, and I just learned a little bit English. No help because you must have when I was young learn, studying you must have too much money, it is too expensive ...six, seven, eight, no eight years [of school]. Only eight years. I have tested I do over half. I know, I write and I talk to the teacher, I not scared just talk talk talk, and the teacher says "you do okay. You take the grammar test, okay." and my level is upper than my husband. I feel the difficulty is now. Many vocabulary, many new words I don't understand because I have not learned before. [...] It is just grammar, I studied grammar before. Grammar, there are things, I do one hundred. There is only one I don't know how to do. I don't know, give me the very hard level. (FENG, Carol)

In Alicia's class, all students had completed high school, and few comments were made about the difficulty of studying English. The students in

Alicia's class demonstrated more self confidence and knew how to learn. Luba, an engineer from Russia, was working as a janitor in a warehouse. In spite of the fact that she felt she would not obtain a job relevant to her qualifications, the value she held for education was apparent in her behaviour and attitude in the classroom. She said it was also important to learn English to assist her children in becoming successful in Canada. In class she did not hesitate to answer questions, and knew how to ask for correction when she felt unsure of proper grammar usage as shown in the interview with me below.

> ...cleaning, it is typical, typical? Typical job for immigrant. [laughs] Special job, but I am glad that I have it. I clean wholesale with my husband. It's okay, I don't have complaint, *a* complaint -- is it good? (LUBA, Alicia)

And Irina, also from Alicia's class states that she enjoys learning grammar, because it is not difficult for her. For students who had higher levels of previous education, and especially for those who had learned languages before, grammar was not as intimidating as for those with less formal education. Many students, expressed an understanding of the need to learn grammar to learn English.

> But I know I have to study grammar. I enjoy, I don't know why, I don't have some trouble in understand grammar. I understand grammar and it isn't hard for me. And I like study something about grammar because my eyes open more and more and more. It is like if puzzle. If before I study this I didn't understand when I can use if and how and after it is ... but we have time. I understand grammar, I understand, and but we have time to use this grammar. (IRINA, Alicia)

Thus, there was an overall advantage for students who had higher levels of education. They knew how to learn, they felt comfortable with the classroom setting and grammatical or abstract concepts, and they had higher levels of confidence. This provided the opportunity to participate more in the class and to absorb more of the information related to them.

## Exposure to Other Languages

As shown above, levels of previous formal education hold a strong influence in students' confidence and aptitude, but exposure to other languages also had an effect. Although many students did not feel that learning a language other than English helped them, others felt that having studied language structures before does provide an advantage. For students who had not studied another language, everything was new and required conceptualization in a way they were not familiar with, especially if they had not learned grammar in their first language. Prior exposure to grammatical concepts and multiple lexicons lessened the alien nature of learning a new language.

Some students with few years of formal education, but who had learned another language (e.g., from a parent), seemed to have a stronger propensity to learn English than those who did not. Gnoc, for example, seemed to feel a slight advantage over students who had little education and were not exposed to a foreign language before because, although she had only six years of formal schooling in Kampuchea, her father spoke French. Gnoc was in her second class together with Cara (mentioned above), who was in her fourth class. They have 5 and 6 years of formal education, but Gnoc learned French from her father before he died, and this seems to have helped her studies somewhat.

> Gnoc: Because I small I speak, learned a little French, I forgot. I learned English, know French and I understand some English. I was born Kampuchea. I went Vietnam, I no study.
>
> Lori: How many years did you go to school?
>
> Gnoc: Six years and then I go to Vietnam . .... I spoke French really well, but in Vietnam I forgot. Because I speak French to sister, father and I speak Kampuchea with mother. Father Vietnamese, he speak two language and his language, also English and French. My father die, in Cambodia, when I come to Vietnam he die. So I help her, because I have six sister and brother I am oldest. ... With Father speak French. Father die, no speak, I forgot. Now I watch TV, I understand. I difficult English, yet I study one and yet I understand ... Second class in [this school]. Before I study French, helps. (GNOC, Darrell)

Nevertheless, for some students, having studied languages before did not seem an advantage to them. In fact, some feel that no matter how much they study they may never speak English well. Tuyet, for instance, suggests that her difficulties learning English may be because she is Vietnamese. Tuyet, in Steven's class, completed high school, and studied a little English and Russian. She has proceeded to the Core E class, but still does not have much confidence.

> Tuyet: I think grammar I understand. When I said grammar I usually know. But in Vietnam, or in Canada many Vietnamese study good grammar but have problem speak and listen. With everything many people speak English, speak very fast, I think I live a long time in Canada, maybe I will speak very well, but short time not good.
>
> Lori: Do you like studying English?
>
> Tuyet: Yes, I like but sometimes I angry myself because I think, oh, I not intelligent to study English. Why English difficult for me? (TUYET, Steven)

For some students, having learned another language before helps, but initially can also pose some difficulties. Several students mentioned that they felt that having learned a foreign language before did not help them learn English, especially if they felt the other language was dissimilar to English. Although some students felt that studying another language helped them because they understood basic grammatical concepts, at times it could conflict with the current studies. Jamal, who had previously studied French, sometimes confuses French spelling for English. Although this did not slow his oral proficiency, which was very strong, it did pose problems for his written work.

> Yeah, it helps to write and ... but do you know that when I write in class, I write in French. It is hard, because when you want to write something, it is spelled different in English. "A" here is "ah" in French, and I use like "ah," but now I am forgetting French. And I need more English, sometimes some words I don't understand. (JAMAL, Carol)

Some students had extensive exposure to specific aspects of English. If previous studies focused one facet of English, such as writing or grammar, while leaving out other parts of the language such as speaking, students could have a

very imbalanced ability with English. For Bing, grammar was easy because he had learned it before, but speaking was very difficult. Interestingly, for Bing, learning grammar did not equal learning English.

> Bing: This is my first English teacher in Canada.
>
> Lori: Did you study English in China?
>
> Bing: No, but lots of grammar. Yesterday with Carol we have interview. I tell her the grammar class is very easy but I think maybe not difficult for me. Tell her, because I learn a lot before, but I think other student not know same as me. Today this morning's class, some students make lots of mistakes, so our teacher Carol takes lots of time to tell them correct grammar. I think it is very interesting for me, but I can understand. (BING, Carol)

As seen in the quote above, Bing places the group needs ahead of his individual interest, which may also reflect the importance of the group in Chinese education and society. Nevertheless, perhaps due to the way grammar is taught in China, it was difficult for Bing to understand how some students still made mistakes after Carol spent a long time explaining the grammar.

> Only the learn English help. In China learn a lot in class, before in one class learn a lot, but here learn a little for grammar. Maybe learn the tense, past tense, present tense, future tense students maybe one week whole, teach all. Because the teacher in China teach all. Here, Carol on the past tense, maybe two class. Maybe future tense two class. Many students can't follow. They can still mistakes. Even though she goes slowly, they still make mistakes. I can't understand. (BING, Carol)

However, if the exposure to English was limited, so was the advantage. Carlos and Adriana emphasized how they had learned English, but only very basic vocabulary and phrases. They said they learned to say "This is a pencil" and similar phrases, but that instruction was not serious, and thus the advantage of previous learning was limited.

ADRIANA. Yep, because in my country teach a little, not is long it is not much in my country. They speak English and explain in Spanish in the class.

L. Do the students speak English in class?

ADRIANA. No, not a little. For example in my country I am study, and in Canada I study. In my country for my teacher says bad pronunciation "I am stoodying," and is wrong. And now I have difficult with English, I don't understand some words in English. Many problems here. They don't teach English seriously in my country. You don't learn hardly anything [Muchos problemas aqui. No enseñan inglés en serio en mi país. No se aprende casi nada. ]For some people is important in my country, but for many no. (ADRIANA, Darrell)

Past exposure to English also enabled some students to progress quickly from one level to another, even skipping levels. Maria, for example, studied two years of English at university in Poland, and here in Canada jumped from Core A (a low class) to Intermediate, without being in Core E (an upper low-level class). Like Bing, she feels that her grammar is better than her spoken English, perhaps because the move was very fast.

I studied two years at university, but only grammar. Because the teacher was Polish and he spoke Polish and English. In my country I couldn't learn English because I speak only Polish. Only three hours a week study English, but only spoke write learn grammar. Before I was in Core A, and now I jumped to intermediate, I never been in Core E, because my grammar is better than I can speak. I am in Canada 8 months, it is short time. I have to practice but many people who speak English better than me. Yeah, it is a problem and school in Canada and second class, for me it is short time. (MARIA, Alicia)

Although not many students mentioned it, some found being in a class with students who had a strong grasp of the English language intimidating, and they did not feel comfortable speaking. For students who had learned English before, parts of the lessons would be review, and they would often remember points of grammar when mentioned by the instructor. Students who had not studied English before said that they needed more time and explanations, but often felt inhibited to ask. One such student, Varina, felt that it was important

that students who learned a lot of English before moving to Canada not be in a class together with students who had not studied much English.

> I think for me is very important who study English before, not with me together English now. Okay, if they study English their country, I know English no good, grammar, or pronunciation, but they *study*. Now Alicia explain, he or she say "I know." He or she make mistake, now study this: *the* United States, *the* Saskatchewan River, but they study before. Now I think for they easy, only repeat, repeat; for me everything new. Everything new ... I think only test, I don't know [Azim] has 93 %, I have 86%. No difference, only 10% but his English is much better than mine. And I don't comfortable now. But four or five month study English I think I do better ... Alicia says don't worry, why you worry? when I protest, she said me "I think that is no good. Students who studied before one class, new students one class." Now one intermediate one, every student new student. I think that is good, I don't know. Mixed now. But for me, I think because I am afraid, I not talking as much. (VARINA, Alicia)

Many students, including Azim, mentioned that Azim talked a lot in class, and in the interview with his instructor, Alicia mentioned that Azim asked very advanced questions which only benefit himself. Nonetheless, Krysta, a student in Alicia's class, mentioned that she liked having Azim in her class, as she learned by listening to him. Ironically, Azim, the student in Alicia's class with the strongest English ability, felt that he had a disadvantage learning English now. He felt that he had learned a lot of grammar in Egypt, but had not learned to speak or pronounce words properly, so now he needs to unlearn the improper English.

> They know the grammar as well as British people. ... But in the practice or the accent, nothing. That is the reason which make our language on wrong basis. That is my problem yeah, because if I didn't study English at all it would be easier to get it, English as a new language. But I have wrong basics, so it is very difficult to adjust wrong basics and to start because you already have wrong rules about English. ... Because if I have just study now, I would take your accent. I would take your way of sentence structure. But I came here with my wrong accent and my wrong structure, and it is already built with me for several years, so it is like to have to destroy a building and to build rebuild another building, but it will be much

easier if you have a ground and you just only building. (AZIM, Alicia)

Students who had experienced studying languages before were also exposed to the natural talent some individuals have for learning languages. Sergei, from Yugoslavia, recognized that some people are more adept at learning foreign languages than others. He had learned Russian and understands almost everything in Russian. However, when I asked if it helped him learn English, he pointed out the relative ability of individuals, and relates the ability of learning languages to the ability to play music.

Lori: Do you think that having studied another language before helps you study English now?

Sergei: I am not sure. I not sure because I have brothers and brothers is learn second language much faster than me. Because some people know how to learn second language, other people don't know. I think this is very interesting stuff. Like music. Know how to play and easy to play any kind of instrument. But if you don't have music in here [pointing to his head] you don't know how to play any instrument. ... I enjoy music. Yeah, I like. But I have music inside. Yeah. Good for me. I think help me because I think my listening is better and after my speaking will be better. But listening for me is very important, because if I listen how you speak, how is your pronunciation and how is everything people, how is my teacher and I think and after I remember. Sometimes I practice in my head. (SERGEI, Steven)

The combination of learning different languages, having a high level of education, and the experience of living in different countries appears to hold a great advantage. Ching, from Carol's class, is the student who Carol felt improved the most overall through her course. This is in spite of Ching coming from China, where students have a general culture of silence in the classroom and are often perceived as having poor pronunciation and better written than spoken ability. Ching had studied Japanese for seven years, and then German for two years at university. She then moved to Germany where she spoke

German. These factors combined seemed to provide an advantage for her in learning English.

> I studied English two years at university, before that I studied Japanese. From elementary school to high school. 7 years Japanese, but I forget everything. That's too bad for me, I forget. I want to keep Japanese. I studied German two years, but German is very practical for me because I was living in Germany and I spoke German every day and all the time. In Germany there are few Chinese there. [laughs] Here it is more, more difficult because there are many Chinese here and then I have to speak Chinese every day, all the time, but I don't like. I want to speak English. (CHING, Carol)

Having learned other languages can help, since students are familiar with grammatical concepts and may have some basic understanding of English; however, not all felt that it was an advantage. As Sergei points out, however, some individuals have a gift for learning languages which he saw with his brother. Another factor which may assist students is the manner in which they were taught in their home country, and an examination of these issues follows.

## Instruction Style

Most students felt that instruction in Canada is different from that in their country of origin. The majority of the students stated that those teachers had been very strong, strict, and possessed great authority in the classroom. Some students stated that the difference could be because they were studying as adults in Canada, whereas they were children when they previously studied. Nonetheless, the experience as a child could influence the behaviour of the adults, as they took on the role of student.

The experience that they had as a child could influence their behaviour in the classroom, as Ling indicates below. She said that in China students do not joke, but here in the ESL classroom, students joke and talk. She said later that she rarely jokes, but enjoys that other students do.

> In classroom, because I don't know if it is because different company, I think so the students my country different because my country

> students they are every day do anything because go school is more children. Studies is adult is different, and we are in company and they are joking here. In my country no joking. Only in my country only few times can joking and talking. In classroom is no talking, but only ask questions okay, but no talking in classroom. (LING, Steven)

Perhaps also due to the recognition of the adult status of the students, teachers were also said to be more understanding of the difficulties some students had in completing their homework, for example. In Vietnam, Cam said that her teachers did not allow students to forgo completion of their homework, for any reason. She later said that she appreciated that her teacher here in Canada is more understanding, because she is a single mother and occasionally finds it difficult to complete her homework. As well as requiring a great deal of time, which may not be available if her children are sick, for example, she does not want to feel the added stress of a reprimand from the instructor.

> Lori: How are the teachers in Vietnam?
>
> CAM: Serious. More than here. In my country more serious. Not like in Canada if you don't do your homework you tell the teacher "I am busy yesterday," and teacher "what's the matter?" In my country, they say "you do that." Very strong. You must do that, if you don't do that you must go out. (CAM, Steven)

Cara, however, contradicted this by saying that in Vietnam a student could be absent and not encounter any difficulties, but here in Canada, if you are absent and do not inform the school, it can be problematic. However, Cara had only five years of school, and therefore may not have experienced the repercussions of absences as her parents were responsible for her. Furthermore, with only five years of formal schooling, she may not yet have entered the level of school where instruction becomes more strict. Nevertheless the following citation shows the difference she felt.

> No, teacher in Vietnam absent O.K., no say anything in class. If absent no say anything in class, no problem. In Canada, problem. Absent three days no phone office have problem, but Vietnam no problem. (CARA, Darrell)

Many of the students appreciated the friendly nature of the instructors. Ling said that she did not like the serious nature of teachers in China, and likes friendly teachers, such as Steven, who smile.

> I think is different a little. This teacher is every day smiling, but our teachers not smiling, every day is [with face serious] ratatata. Every day order you are master, do this, do that ... Yeah, because this is [ ] I like it here. In my country teacher is only order, I don't like. I like teacher more friendly. (LING, Steven)

For students from Vietnam and China, it appears that the teaching style they had been exposed to consisted of the instructor speaking and the students listening. Thuy, in Darrell's class, said that teachers in Vietnam talk too much. And, even though at an earlier point in the conversation she said she does not know how to speak, she said that she speaks very well here. This may actually be that she can speak here, whereas in Vietnam she was not able to speak at all. In fact, in class Thuy rarely spoke, which may reflect the silence of students she was accustomed to as a student in Vietnam.

> Thuy: This class so-so, because grammar have problem. Sometimes I speak with my friends, sometimes no understand, because I don't know speak ...
>
> Lori: Do you think school in Vietnam is like school here?
>
> Thuy: No, here I speak very well. In my country school every teacher speak not the same here.
>
> Lori: Do students speak much in Vietnam?
>
> Thuy: No, very little. I think teacher speak to student too much. Student no speak English with everybody. Only listen and write. (THUY, Darrell)

It appears that the contrast provides students with certain advantages. For example, students who studied previously in systems with very strict rules and a strong sense of authority learned how to learn and to structure their learning. Furthermore, the fact that the teachers in Canada are less "frightening" than those of their past allows students to feel comfortable and more inclined to speak. Helena indicates this in the following statement.

> But school is different like here. School in Poland is very difficult. Teacher in Poland is very strong, and if you didn't do your homework next day you have big problem. Yeah, I spoke about my homework, I have to do my homework, I must do my homework, yeah ... It is different, when I was in school, when I went to school in Poland every day I was scared because teacher in Poland is very strong and you can't do something you can't talk, couldn't talk, nothing. Only you have to listen to your teacher you couldn't tell your idea, no. And if you did something not good, the teacher spank you. (HELENA, Steven)

Like Helena, from Poland, Surya, from India also indicates that the contrast of teaching style helps students feel more comfortable and safe in their learning environment. For Surya, she felt the rules and the power of the instructors she had had before in India, and was afraid. In Canada, she feels not only safe to ask questions, but is also complimented and encouraged in this behaviour by her teacher, a behaviour which had carried repercussions in India.

> I like teachers here. Teachers here are more responsible for the students. They care more. If they know the students are more weak they must want to help. But over there is not like this. Like teacher come in the class, must say sir or madam. That's okay, discipline. And most of the university has uniform. And after, if you want ask many question, teacher think you are like a poor student. She don't want, she only want intelligent students. If she teaching a subject, and everybody understand everybody say understand, but if somebody don't understand, and they don't say I don't understand. If say I don't understand she explain one time, and if you say I don't understand, maybe she get mad. Here I saw teacher, if I ask many times she tell many times. If I understand okay, and if I don't understand I explain more and more. I say, my teacher in India like this teacher, maybe I better student. Teacher is like punishment, teacher can hit students. Teacher like boss, I am so scare. If my teacher walking here, I must behind her walk. If walk I supposed to like this [put head down] I must let teacher go first, like this [moves body back] Teacher have like some power, students scared of teachers. They can talk little but, I am not scared here. I talk all time with teachers here. My first teacher, she is so nice, and she tells me, "you ask many questions I like, I want all my students talks like this, and I want to same to talk next class." I said "talking may be my habit, I just talk talk." But I like teachers here. That's not like my country. (SURYA, Steven)

The perceived status of teachers may also result in a difference in the behaviour in the classroom. Many students mentioned being afraid of the instructors in their home country, whereas they do not feel afraid of the instructors here in Canada. Tanya admits that she sometimes did not want to go to college in Poland due to the fear, but does not feel this anxiety to the same extent in Canada.

> Tanya: It is different. In Poland, teacher and doctor and priest is very important person. Very important. And between you and them is like a wall. Here is easier. When I came to this school, I was happy. I started with students from many different countries. And a wonderful teacher. Very friendly. ... When I went to college in Poland I was afraid every day. Some days I didn't want to go to college. Same my country, other countries.
>
> Lori: Are you ever afraid here?
>
> Tanya: No, well maybe sometimes. Depends on character. Every teacher has different character. One teacher is very friendly so short time I can see them. Inside is very friendly, but outside is difficult show. But most teachers is very nice, very good. (TANYA, Alicia)

Students who had a culture of talking in the class in their country of origin may feel more inclined to speak and participate in the classroom with the eradication of the fear factor. Feeling more comfortable in the classroom, where the teacher is more friendly, students with the previous experience of being expected to speak in class would not feel as hesitant to participate. As stated by Varina, from Yugoslavia, the teacher was the boss and instruction was very authoritarian, but students had to speak.

> Varina: In my country teacher is very strict. Teacher is boss. Every day teacher ask my answer, he puts marks; 1,2,3,4,5, high school. Every day. Never test. Maybe sometimes, but speaking is very important.
>
> Lori: Did you speak a lot in class?
>
> Varina: Teacher in class new lesson, next day student speak. Teacher mark everything. Very difficult. Everybody finish elementary school, Law. After that your choice. (VARINA, Alicia)

Unlike the schooling Varina had experienced, Bing from China said that instruction is very authoritarian and strict, but students do not speak in class.

The teacher is the one who speaks, and the students listen. Therefore, students coming from a system such as this may feel less comfortable speaking in class, due to their having experienced a culture of silence, although they do not necessarily feel afraid. In fact, some students may feel that they speak more in their ESL classes because in their home country they may not have spoken at all. The amount they speak is actually relatively small, and they may wish to speak more, but feel unaccustomed to the idea of speaking in class.

> I think it is interesting, because I have learned in China in middle school and at university, the teacher in the class speaking and the student listening. No speaking. Very different. So I am interested here. In the class the student speak many times, but in China no, you can't. Every time listen to teacher. But I think is different, two countries, very interesting. (BING, Carol)

Furthermore, Bing said that speaking English could be the cause of great ridicule.

> I learned English because I have a relative, my father in Canada so I learned English. But nobody speak English in the university, nobody speak. Yeah. If you speak English, they laugh at you. (BING, Carol)

And because the instruction in China mostly consisted of the instructor speaking a little English and then providing all explanation in Chinese, Bing felt less able to speak and understand, especially outside of class.

> Bing. So so. Because in our class many students can speak a lot than me, so I am a little quiet.
>
> L. Do you want to speak more?
>
> Bing. I want to but I can't speak more.
>
> L. Why not?
>
> Bing. Because sometimes I can not express my meaning. But I understand, tell Carol 100 % understand in class but after class I don't understand. Listen to the radio or T.V. and only 5 % or 10 %. Some difficult things. I don't know why. I know Carol teach in our class something, and after class I have time some listening and I don't know why don't understand. Another module three, listening class the teacher tells what you study, and learn British English. A little bit different. "Going to", "Gonna". Very difficult. (BING, Carol)

Some students become very critical of their previous education, stating that the authoritarian teaching style combined with the instruction of irrelevant information did not lead to a propitious learning environment. As Ivana says below, she thinks the teacher and student should have a friendly relationship, and the content should reflect that which students require in their life.

> Yeah, very different. Yeah in my country teacher was like a god. And I don't like because I think teacher must be friend with student. And in my country we talk many things who we don't need in life and we teach not experience, only reading, reading, reading, and after one year we forget many thing. (IVANA, Alicia)

Students also mentioned the importance of having relevant content in the classroom. This, together with knowing how to learn and the comfortable environment of the classroom, helped facilitate student learning. Maria, from Alicia's class, articulately states how having learned under a strict and demanding educational system in Poland has provided her with learning skills. The more relaxed atmosphere, with friendlier teachers, has reduced her stress, and provided her the opportunity to practice that which she has learned. Thus, difference is not necessarily a disadvantage, for it depends upon where that difference lies.

> Teaching different. Now I know many new words and everything I try and practice. In Poland I studied grammar, only grammar. Now I don't have problem with grammar, but if I have to tell the same it is problem for me. It is different, because teachers in Poland are different. I cannot say to a teacher in Poland "you"; I can't. Only Mr. and Mrs., and teachers in Poland are like boss, I can't speak like with Alicia, with teacher I can't, because when I talk to Alicia, she want to know my problems, what I want, but in Poland teacher only gave us lesson or topics or some material and if you don't understand it is your problem. If I have problem I have to read more and find some answer in the book. Sometimes I can ask teacher, but at university I could ask; but in high school, no. Every high school in Poland difficult, stress and difficult. So much stress that every night I can't sleep. I have to learn much material more than here. And I was nervous every day, I was so thin more than here. But it was high level, but when I was at university, I had to learn very more and before exam, two times year, but every day I had to come on the lesson and hear and lots of ... I think school is different. Now easier

> because in the past I had to work hard, now if I want I want, but now different, if I have to do homework and many lots of homework, it is okay, because I had to do that before, but teaching is different. (MARIA, Alicia)

## Loss of Status

For some students, moving to Canada caused a feeling of a loss of status and inadequacy, especially in relation to the qualifications they had achieved. There was a strong desire to regain this lost status and feeling of confidence in oneself, although some students recognized that it will be difficult to get a job like that which they had in their country of origin. Coming to terms with this appeared to be an issue for students who had higher levels of education and professions, which they felt could not be regained in Canada. For Ivan, the move to Canada led to feelings that he is like a child once again, but he is frustrated with his inability to speak correctly and is afraid to make mistakes.

> Do you know that sometimes things come out, but [] they say to me. I don't know why. Sometimes I don't know why, I don't know if I am afraid to make a mistake, but that happens all over the world. And with you I can talk Spanish like I want, because I feel that I speak Spanish well, and everyone thinks the same, like oneself. That you can teach to people who know Spanish, and their language is Spanish and they don't know anything that they say, and it takes a lot of effort to understand them. But I don't know, my wife studied at university like you, and knows English well, sounds bad. I want to speak English like you speak Spanish. And like I knew in Cuba, I was boss. I was the boss of a little group, this group was a technical group of equipment X-ray. Not X-ray in the hospital, but X-ray in the airport. In Cuba I worked at customs, in all Cuba. No, technico. Fix machine. Sometimes this machine is broken a lot. If possible, I will look for a job to do here, but I could never get a job like that here. Now Cuba is in a bad situation with the world. There I lived with my family. My father will retire now but he was a colonel in the army, as they say in English, "Colonel." He is retired and has a good salary and never turned down a job. I can not speak as many Cubans do, because I can come and go as I please. They had left and can not return to Cuba even if they love Cuba--because I got married in Cuba. (IVAN, Darrell) (Translated from Spanish by researcher)

Similarly, in a conversation with Sergei, he said that he was able to work and become successful in Yugoslavia in spite of the war, because he knew how things worked. Coming to Canada brought about many changes, for everything was new, including the language. For Sergei, it meant having to learn the system all over again. He said it was like being a child again, but not a naive child because you had accumulated information over the years before. Perhaps the most emotive statement of all was when he said, "I want to be normal in Canada, like I was normal in Yugoslavia." Similar sentiments were expressed by Zelimer in the following quote:

> I want to know English well, I want to be a normal person. I want to know read, listen, like in my country. I want to know read, listen and all. (ZELIMIR, Alicia)

Tanya, a social worker from Poland, had thought that her profession would assist her in adjusting to her new life after moving to Canada. Upon her arrival in Canada, however, Tanya found that she was shy, and her whole life had changed so drastically that it was overwhelming. Tanya was very emotional through this part of the conversation, and especially when she said that she feels that her life is now like that of the clients she served in Poland. And her situation was such that she had to quit school the day after the interview to assist with the family finances. Fortunately, she was later able to return to school.

> No, I don't care about it, because when I knew I come to Canada, I thought it would be easy and I would communicate with everyone like a child. And my study English would be better. This is true, but I find people talk with me, I feel shy. When I came for first month, I can't go outside, I am afraid everywhere, and everybody. I like traveling I was in different country, alone, only with my children I wasn't afraid. Now I am here and I know this is my new life and I must, I was afraid. I think it was [? ] because I had a flat in Poland and everything I got rid of to my sister, everything. And my apartment was really beautiful, not big, but I lived there 18 years. And after I came, I saw my new apartment it was empty. Without anything. No furniture, nothing. I felt like poor person. And it was my occupation, it was important for me, I worked with poor people in Poland. Helped money, helped get special ticket for dinner. And my situation now is like that. And I can tell to my daughter that give me good things, always I must be patient for my clients and always

> polite and now my life is quiet and I was right. Now my life is like my clients. (TANYA, Alicia)

The change from being familiar with one's system and feeling like a contributing member of society to being a stranger in a new world was overwhelming for some students. The loss in social position resulted in a drive to go forward and regain what had been lost, but also in a feeling of helplessness and emptiness, which as Tanya said caused so much fear she was unable to go anywhere. Sergei saw English as the key to moving forward, Ivan felt that English is a barrier, and Tanya found that her family responsibilities hindered her from learning English. The desire to regain lost status was important to many students and assisted them in setting goals, which, as will be discussed in the next chapter, was an important factor in student learning.

## Summary

Educational background had a great effect on students and their propensity to learn English. Familiarity with the classroom environment, with studying, with abstract or grammatical concepts, or with English itself provided students with an advantage. Students who had little previous education often found English more challenging and did not understand grammar as easily. The teaching style that students were familiar with also affected their perception of their English class as well as their comfort with speaking in class. Students who had achieved a high level of social status in their home country felt that English was a means to attain goals they had set. Previous education alone can not determine all of the imbalances in learning and participation. Following is a discussion of sex/gender, which also had an impact on students' participation and learning.

## Gender

Gender differences were often referred to by students, but they often did not perceive them as being due to one's sex. Often, students would comment that there was no difference between men and women in the classroom, but would then discuss an aspect of the classroom which demonstrated a difference. Interestingly, in response to a direct question regarding difference between men and women, students often answered that it was "no problem."

During the course of the interviews students discussed several ways that men and women differ, even when they said there were no problems. As stated above, when asked directly about differences, students were reluctant to discuss them or were unaware of such differences. Nevertheless, in spite of the fact that many students said that men and women are the same, and that there is "no problem," differences in classroom behaviour, the need to juggle responsibilities, and pregnancy were some of the issues raised by students.

### Are Men the Same as Women?

Many students stated that there was "no difference" between the men and women in their classes, or that for them having men and women in the class together was "no problem." Some students who felt that there was no difference attributable to being male or female suggested that difference was a matter of individual personality. Joseph, from Steven's class, said that "it depends on who they are the person." The students who felt it was "no problem" said that they can talk to, and enjoy talking to, both men and women. Thus, it would seem that if differences exist (which was neither confirmed or denied in some instances), they were not seen as being relevant to the ESL classroom. Maria, from Alicia's class, said, "I like to talk to men and women. No problem." Similarly, Cara, from Darrell's class, said, "Men okay, women okay." Tanya suggests that everyone has difficulties, and that she feels equally comfortable talking with men as with women.

> No, everybody has something that they feel down, this is life. I can talk about everything. I am not shy, and I can talk about anything because for me everything is interesting. And I know that I can ask man or woman anything. (TANYA, Alicia)

Some students related gender differences to one's ability to learn English, and in this regard they did not see differences in males' or females' capabilities. Helena claims that everyone in the class works well with one another and all speak well.

> No, I don't think so, I think everybody is good. Everybody speak together. Everyone's problem or something, very good speaking. (HELENA, Steven)

Several students did feel that there may be some differences, but that they had not given it much consideration. In fact, Ivan, from Darrell's class, says that each student is different, and he is not interested in the reasons why. Ivan talks to everyone in spite of their sex or country of origin and dismissed the importance of these differences.

> No. Each student is different. I have never thought about this [difference between men and women] because it doesn't interest me. Every day in the morning I come to class but I tell the Chinese people "How are you Thuy? How are you Lan?" (IVAN, Darrell)

Other students seem to have noticed some differences between men and women, but were not able to express what the differences were. Gan, from Alicia's class, maintained that he saw differences in the classroom but was unable to explain further. He appeared very frustrated with his lack of ability to describe the differences, but he was suffering from the flu and fatigue at the time of the interview, and often apologized for his lack of clarity. Perhaps if he had not been so fatigued he could have explained more clearly, but as it was he does state that there are differences.

> I think different. Different between like for example, Azim and Irina, they are different. Some I think different is the way Azim speaking his action different from Irina. I don't know how explain. Just different. (GAN, Alicia)

In some instances students were quite strong in denying that difference was due to any factor other than individual personality. Some students saw different levels of participation but did not attribute this to sex or nationality. Ping, for instance, points out contradictory examples which demonstrate that there is no pattern to the desire to speak, other than a natural predilection.

> Ping: No difference between women and men. No, Chinese people like to speak, some Egyptian like to speak, some Chinese don't like to speak, some Egyptian don't like to speak.
>
> Lori: Between men and women?
>
> Ping: For example Eva like speak more, Jamal like speak more. Bing don't like speak. And Arif like speak more. But Wei don't like speak more. It is very different. No men, no women. (PING, Carol)

In three of the four classes the numbers of male and females were approximately equal, with the exception of Steven's class. Steven's class had only five men and thirteen or fourteen women. Several students mentioned how the disproportionate number of women influenced the interaction in the class. Emphasis was made to the fact that women spoke more than men, although this would seem to be a logical result of the ratio of women to men. Yasmeen, for instance, said that men and women are the same. She also said that there were more women in the class and felt that women speak more than men, which seems natural. The observations revealed that while some women spoke, the men received more overall speaking time, and some women received almost no time to speak.

> No. The same but in my class, because woman is more than man, I think the woman speak more than man. Yeah. Only four men. And fourteen women. (YASMEEN, Steven)

Also from Steven's class, Sergei initially states that there is no difference between men and women, but then as he speaks he describes several ways in which they differ. The differences, he suggests, are natural and exist all over the world. He reiterated the long-standing stereotype that women like to talk and that some women talk too much.

> Sergei: No, in my class. But women is first. Only four men, but good men.
>
> Lori: So, no difference in the class?
>
> Sergei: Different, whole world, men and women are different. Women like to talk, women in every country. This is true. Some women talk too much, but some women no. (SERGEI, Steven)

For many students, it was difficult to conceptualize the differences between the men and women, and many perceived no difference. As stated in the literature review, socialization may cause us to accept differences between men and women as natural, or in fact, cause us to misinterpret the character of the bias. Others did see differences, but could not explain these differences or felt that they caused no difficulty in the class. As stated earlier, as often happens due to the nature of interviewing, students did remark upon differences, but often during the course of conversation about other aspects of the classroom.

## Gendered Behaviour in the Classroom

Some of the areas where male and female students seemed to differ relate to their behaviour in the classroom. Female students, particularly in lower level classes, reported that male students were stronger than female students. Thuy is a soft-spoken Vietnamese woman in Darrell's class. She said that "in class there are men too much [than] women. Too strong." (THUY, Darrell). Perhaps part of this feeling could be due to the desire expressed by several men to claim their space in the classroom. Several men, in three of the four classes, stated that they would speak if they wanted to, regardless of what other students or the teacher think. No women in the interviews stated this. One example of a man who felt this way is Carlos, from Darrell's class.

> If the teacher is smile or the teacher is serious that his problem, not my problem. If I want to talk, I talk. (CARLOS, Darrell)

Similarly, in Alicia's class, Azim admits that other students have said that he speaks too much and he knows it bothers them, but he says that he does not care; he feels he has to speak.

Azim: Some activities, yes, it is more like something here we have to speak. I didn't used to speak too much. (Another student hears this and laughs) Yes, that's truth. I didn't used to speak too much before, so now I try and speak too much to pronounce my English, I know that bothering you but I will do.

Lori: Why do you say it is bothering?

Azim: Because they said that I speak too much in the class.

Lori: Yeah? What do you think?

Azim: No, I don't care, because I have to speak. Yes, because if I don't speak ... (Another student says: "not so much, we like listen to him). Yeah, that's good. (AZIM, Alicia)

Although several men said that they will speak regardless of how other students feel, none of the women interviewed made similar confessions. In fact, several mentioned how they would stay quiet if it was someone else's turn, even though the courtesy was not always reciprocated. Rurik, mentioned by Adriana below, was a particularly vocal student who many students said they found annoying. Adriana says that she speaks when it is her turn, and otherwise is quiet.

Lori: Is there lots of time to talk in class?

Adriana: Yeah, but when the turn is the other person I am quiet. Not like Rurik, because often people say "Is the question for you or for me?" O.K. quiet. I have no problem, I am quiet. Some students have a problem. All the time Rurik. When I talk and he interrupted and I don't like it. It is my question, my answer, not yours. And I get angry. Yeah. The concentration is (como se dice disturba mi concentración?) breaks? Yeah, breaks my concentration. (ADRIANA, Darrell)

Further to the idea expressed by Adriana, who only speaks when it is her turn, Svetlana admits that she feels she speaks too much and wished that the instructor would ask her to be quiet to give a chance to other students. Svetlana was very open in the interviews and conversations, and expressed her chagrin

that quiet students did not have much opportunity to speak. She said that other students may not want to say anything, because they do not want to be seen criticizing the teacher or complaining; they felt this may put the class in jeopardy. Svetlana felt it important to say in order to attempt to improve overall instruction, because improvements can not be made if problems are not known.

> Svetlana: I am thinking I speak more than other students. More than another students in class because is my, I am very interested in this, and I don't like just sitting and listening and I like activity and maybe because this is my character, I am very energetic. Yeah.
>
> Lori: Are other students in the class quieter?
>
> Svetlana: Yeah, but I don't know why. Maybe don't have chance because I speak. Sometimes I wish teacher would say Svetlana wait other person speak, but no. (SVETLANA, Steven)

Sergei is also from Steven's class, and he admits that he too may talk too much. He, however, says that he feels compelled to speak because otherwise the instructor may have a false perception of his ability. Furthermore, Sergei feels that intelligent people should speak and not stay quiet, and he thinks himself intelligent. He too, like Svetlana, also expressed some concern that he and other students may speak too much, thus robbing the opportunity from other students.

> Sergei: I think I talk a lot in the class, maybe sometimes too much. Some students almost same, but you know before, our class I listen and talk and my teacher think I don't understand, think I don't know some words and don't understand what he speak. And I tell you I am surprised because I don't like to be first in everything, middle is O.K. But some students is very nervous, maybe this is life tough to them. Like to speak more, talk more than other students, I feel intelligent. In my country we have intelligent people and I not sure how to explain in English, But if intelligent people think no problem, if speak no problem, if somebody stupid no problem, if talk no problem. I know for sure what is true. But I say if intelligent people not talk, only quiet, stupid people would be first everything. Sometimes you must say, hey you stupid. You must. Sometimes. Not every time or you going to be stupid too.
>
> Lori. Do you find that you talk too much?
>
> Sergei: Because our class we have I am not sure how much students, maybe 16, and only maybe four students talk, me and Svetlana, Ivana, Helena, maybe five or six. Yasmeen. The other students talk,

but not like me. Maybe because some students like me talk too much. Sometimes way too much. (SERGEI, Steven)

Another difference was that some women hesitate to speak out in class if the instructor seemed to be occupied. None of the male students mentioned this. In the intermediate class, for example, Zarifa, a lawyer from the Sudan, does not feel comfortable asking the instructor many questions.

I ask some questions, but sometimes I feel I disturb her if I ask her this and this and this. Sometimes I don't ask her, but usually I ask her. (ZARIFA, Carol)

This feeling of inhibition to ask questions also existed in lower level classes. Thuy, from Darrell's class, indicated that if the teacher is busy, she does not ask him any questions.

Lori: Do you ask the teacher?

Thuy: Sometimes I ask the teacher. Sometimes, no. Because I look for my teacher busy. (THUY, Darrell)

Ching from Carol's class feels that there are differences between males and females, in regards to the amount they speak and their activity level. She also indicates that women tend to be more shy and quiet, which she feels results in better pronunciation and more correct grammar and writing.

Ching: The men and women. Yes, I know. Ah, like the man, ah, one student like Jamal from Egypt, and Arif from Turkey, and I mean the man they are learn English more active like they speak all time and they are not very shy. And they more shy. But the men, they don't make grammar and writing very well. But the woman, I think the man they speak more, but don't speak correct pronunciation, and grammar and writing.

Lori: Why, do you think?

Ching: I think maybe the man is more active and don't like to ... do you understand ruhig?

Lori: quiet or still?

Ching. Yeah, they aren't still at home and read. But the woman, like the old woman like Jiamin, she is still at home and read, and correct and pronunciation. (CHING, Carol)

Some female students admitted that they felt shy and nervous in the class, which caused them to remain quiet, although they did not think that men are the same. Lan said that men are too loud, which is acceptable outside of class, but may result in women staying quiet. She also felt that women are nervous and shy, whereas men are not.

Lan: Yes, very different. I can some men different than women. Um. I think some men talk too loud, than woman. I feel talk loud in lunch time that is O.K. and in class a little bit loudly.

Lori: How do you feel?

Lan: I think men are not nervous, I think women are nervous. Yeah. I think some student I can some woman some nervous. Some shy for men. All shy in. And some woman don't say question again. They quiet. Because some women shy. Quiet.

Lori: Are you shy and quiet?

Lan: Yeah, sometimes. Sometimes Darrell don't say not shy. Teacher "Lan what you think could you question with me, not shy." I say that O.K. (LAN, Darrell)

And it is not only the women who feel this difference. Carlos, from the same class as Lan, also said that women are more shy by habit. Earlier in the interview, he had said that there were no differences between men and women.

Maybe they anyone shy. Yeah. Maybe anyone shy, but I always talk with everyone. No difference for me. Because I don't like to see the people quiet quiet. Quiet is O.K., but not shy nervous. But I think the women are more shy for habit. I have a feeling. (CARLOS, Darrell)

In terms of interaction, Carlos also said that he notices a difference when he speaks to a male as opposed to a female student. He finds that Thuy, a female student, is shy with him, whereas there is no difficulty speaking with Mladin.

> I talk with Mladin, I talk with him, no problem. Thuy no problem for me. I don't know, Thuy I feel she is a little shy. Yeah. When I talk with her I feel she is a little shy with me, but I try to say her don't be shy. I give the *confianza*, trust. So to speak, no problem. Because I don't like to see her shy. Not good for the person because everybody people in the world we have enjoyed the life. Not shy, not afraid. Why? God, he don't like shy. I think so. (CARLOS, Darrell)

Several women expressed confusion as to why they do not speak, even though they want to speak more. Many mentioned being afraid to speak because they do not speak well. Bian from Darrell's classroom said that if she does not know how to say something, she stays quiet.

> I often talk Vietnamese, I inside class. I speak very bad. ... I not shy or nervous, but don't know how speak. I don't know how speak. So don't speak. Other students understand, speak and talking very well. I talk very bad. I no talk. (Bian looks down and smiles)
>
> Lori: If you don't understand do you ask the teacher?
>
> Bian: Yes.
>
> Lori: Every day?
>
> Bian: No. Not every day. Sometimes I don't understand, I ask. (BIAN, Darrell)

Also from Darrell's class, Thuy expressed confusion as to why she does not speak, although she wanted to speak more. When I asked her if she was quiet in class, Thuy said that she is not quiet, but continues by saying that she does not know why she does not speak. The contradiction may be understood in that she answers the teacher when he asks her a question -- speaking --, but she does not go on to speak of her own accord-- not speaking.

> Thuy: No, not quiet. I want to speak a lot.

Lori: Do you speak all the time?

Thuy: No, not all the time. Sometime ask my teacher and I want to speak with my teacher.

Lori: If he asks you questions do you speak?

Thuy: Yeah, I have to speak ...Because I want to speak English too much and listen. I am I want speak and listen too much sometimes I don't know why I no speak.

Lori: You don't speak?

Thuy: Sometimes I don't know speak.

Lori: What do you do?

Thuy: Hmm. I think I don't know speak, I don't speak. (THUY, Darrell)

Adriana from Darrell's class says that although she feels that women are perhaps more shy than men, she does not like to stay quiet. She also says that when some of the women are too afraid to ask questions when they don't understand, she will ask for them. This is similar to the idea of the caretaker role which female students are sometimes seen as taking on.

> But maybe some women are a little more shy. Me no. I don't like to stay quiet. I like to speak, because when I have a problem and I don't understand and I like when I ask and he explain. I don't embarrassed. Because it is important for me. Some people if they sit beside me when they don't understand, I ask them do you understand? They say no, and I ask the teacher for them. Because some people need grammar, but some people is afraid, yeah. I think it is not good. (ADRIANA, Darrell)

Similarly, Aurora helps some of the Vietnamese students, especially with pronunciation, and she asks them if they feel they behave differently because they are women. Aurora is the eldest woman in the class and often appeared to protect the young single women.

> It is O.K. The Vietnamese sometimes they don't speak very well, but it is no problem to me. I just teach the pronunciation, I teach the sometimes the Japanese, Vietnamese. "Do you think that you believe you behave a certain way because you are a woman?" Sometimes they don't say when they are learning, I teach. (AURORA, Darrell)

However, as mentioned earlier by Ping, there are some men and women who like to speak and some who do not. The role of the students' sex in the classes also appeared to be mediated by their country of origin or culture. In some countries, a woman's socialization may result in a stronger character than in other countries, although it would still be different from the socialized behaviours of men. The relationship between the country of origin and the way students of different sexes behave in school is mentioned by Azim. Azim not only mentions the differences between women of different countries, but continues to say that for him European women can be very aggressive. He says he is shy because the women are aggressive, but in actuality, he is the most outspoken student in the class, and many women said that they found him intimidating due to his ability, as well as what he says.

> Azim: Yes, but it depends on which countries the women come from. Because here I think most of the women come from European countries but in, if you find some woman who come from a third world country I think you will find them very shy to start a conversation. But in our class it is O.K., there is no shy women here, but they are very aggressive.
>
> Lori: In what way are they aggressive?
>
> Azim: They speak loudly and they hit you--joking. I would like to tell you a story. One day, Irina she how you call, wrist wrestling, arm wrestling and she won Gan. Yeah, she beat Gan, so that is the way I said the women are very aggressive in this class. What is the reason, I am shy in this class. The women are very aggressive. (AZIM, Alicia)

And at another point in the conversation, Azim says that there is only one person in the class who does not speak, an older man. Once again he mentions Irina, but this time he says that she does not speak much, but throws

reprimanding glances at him, which he attributes to her wanting him to be more quiet.

> No one quiet except Czeslaw. This man [makes a face with a confused look, as if to say that he does not understand 'this man'] and ah, Irina don't speak too much. But she always look at me when I speak too much, because she wants me to be calm like her. (AZIM, Alicia)

Bing also sees a difference between women and men, but says that the differences are more pronounced outside of class because in the class everyone wants to learn English. He says, however, that men and women display different competencies in language learning.

> Bing: Outside class, yeah, speak with them more. But not so different because men or women we both speak English. Doesn't matter because all of us learn English.
>
> Lori: Is there anything that would make the class better for you?
>
> Bing: I want more English speaking, but there are many women they like grammar. Because in China the writing than English writing the symbol. And Eva, she come from Romania she write a little bit, same alphabet. Easier. (BING, Carol)

In relation to their ability to learn it is interesting that one older male who rarely speaks was referred to as a "good student, intelligent, but don't talk." Surya also asserts that women like to talk all the time, but some men don't like to talk.

> No, I didn't find anybody in my class, maybe older a little bit quiet. Like one man in my class, not same thing. One man older from Yugoslavia he talks lots, other man from Poland he don't talk all the time. He is quietest man in the class, he is good student intelligent, but don't talk. Maybe some men don't like to talk, but ladies all the time talking, talking. (SURYA, Steven)

Joseph, the quiet man from Poland, remarked that students would often ask him questions, which he attributed to the length of time he had been in Canada. In fact, Joseph said that he does not like to speak, neither at home nor in school, but felt that if students asked him for information he should oblige. In this regard, it is noteworthy that Joseph had been in Canada for four years, but another student Cam had been in Canada for three and a half years and was not approached for information. So, time in Canada does not appear to be the only factor which played a role. In fact, Cam is a young woman from Vietnam, and Joseph is an older man from Poland. Age, as well as sex and country of origin, could influence the prestige bestowed upon the students.

> I am longest student with stay in Canada four years. Some people is four months, two months. I know more about just life because I am here. I don't practice, but I use many times. Many times people ask, so I talk. (JOSEPH, Steven)

## Pregnancy

One aspect of being a woman which would never affect a man, is being pregnant. Three of the women I interviewed were pregnant, and all three of them mentioned how it had affected their studies. Adriana sometimes has to leave the class due to nausea, Halina quit school for three months, and Zarifa is very tired. The heat in the classroom intensified the discomfort Adriana felt, and the smell of Chinese food in the classroom forced her to leave sometimes, and yet she was too embarrassed to tell the teacher.

> Adriana: Yeah, something when maybe when the people eat in this room and close the door and some food Chinese when they smell is not good, I don't like because some people don't like this smell. I don't like this smell more now because I am pregnant. And I think this is class, not eat in here. Sometimes I have to leave, because there is the smell is too strong and I have nausea. [A veces tengo que irme, porque hay demasiado mal olor y tengo nausea. ]
>
> Lori: Do you say anything to the teacher?
>
> Adriana: No, I don't say anything because I am embarrassed by this. One month and half. Yesterday I went to doctor, and maybe I think I

> am late and doctor tells me I am pregnant. So now second baby. I have one daughter. She is three. (ADRIANA, Darrell)

Halina similarly remarked on the smell of the food in the classroom, and she had had to stop coming to class for a while because of her morning sickness. Now she is able to attend class, although she still feels tired and sensitive to the heat in the classroom.

> Halina: I have been studying English since February. Yeah, because February I no good feel because of the baby. Sick many times, three months. But now is O.K. Smell of food, yeah, before my class Chinese people maybe six or seven in the classroom and they eat lunch in the classroom, and horrible smell for me. But now is no problem. I feel O.K.
>
> Lori: How do you feel?
>
> Halina: Sometimes I am tired. Sometimes. Maybe this room hot, summer. (HALINA, Darrell)

Zarifa, who was very close to her due date, admitted that she felt very tired, and would prefer to not have homework hour at school and be able to go home early. She feels she is very lucky in that her husband helps take care of her son so that she can study, which was a help not all women received.

> Zarifa: Yeah, I like. But sometimes because I am pregnant I feel tired. I like to do it at home because I am very tired. Now this is hard. But I like to study because if I stay home, nothing to do. Wake up every day six thirty and took a bus and come here change the bus and come help me. After husband come home take care of son and I can study. He is nice husband. (ZARIFA, Carol)

## Juggling Family and School

This last quote brings up an issue which affected many of the female students, who have great family responsibilities and do not have time to study or do homework outside of school. Zarifa said that she was lucky to have a nice husband who helps, and would prefer to study at home, but some women said that homework hour is the only opportunity they have to do their homework. Ilona, for example, is married and has grown children, but can not find time or even the space to do her homework.

> In my country I studied hard. Now not so hard. But I write my homework at home, but not study. I don't have time. I have family, everybody all over. Sometimes I don't know where to go to do my homework. Lots of people. My husband, my friend, my other friend, my daughter came to my house with boyfriend. I don't have place, I don't have time. (ILONA, Alicia)

For single parents, there is no one who can help share the responsibilities, and therefore being a single parent placed increasing challenges on some students. In the interviews there were no single fathers, only single mothers, and after hearing the daily routine of being a single mother it is amazing that the students did not fall asleep in class every day.

> Cam: So I must work, nobody help me. If I have a husband my husband work I want, really want to study. But when I go to school, my daughter is sick, my son is problem, you know they make me crazy. They are driving me crazy. Usually I came to school early. Two hour before when we are start. I must stay early then I study at school. Every day I came to school at 7:45, then at 10:00 we are start. Every day, every day. I work. My friend tell me, you work hard, eight hour every day work.
>
> Lori: Do you work too?
>
> Cam: No every day I wake up six o'clock then I go to school. Then I get home about 6 or 5:45 because my house is far, very far from school. One and a half hour by bus. And then a half hour because I

> must take my children come back home with me. You know it must two hour when I get back home every day. What can I do? I come back home six o'clock. Then get them, then after I really am get clothes for my children because I worry tomorrow is late. Everything I must do at night. When I finish working, twelve o'clock, and wake up at six, sometimes early. But I really like to study English. (CAM, Steven)

Adriana had a similar situation, although it was further complicated by the fact that she did have a husband, but he had been a political prisoner in Guatemala and joined her later. Initially, Adriana was concerned about her husband, caring for her daughter and studying. When he arrived in Canada, new difficulties arose in that she became pregnant, and her husband did not help in the home. Aside from this, he was very protective of her, going with her to school every day and talking to her during the breaks, thus reducing her opportunities to interact with classmates in English.

> I have this level but it is difficult for me understand some things, but I don't have time because sometimes at home my daughter is sick and I need care for her, and when I came to Canada I am alone with my daughter and because my husband is not here and I have no time. Every day I come to my home and eat and pick up my daughter and this is a problem. (ADRIANA, Darrell)

Surya said that she did not find the homework difficult, but it was challenging to find time to do her homework. It is not only the housework which puts a strain on her, but also the emotional toll of living with her husband's family.

> I have no problem with homework, but no is no time. Sometimes I do homework, sometimes I come to school to do homework. I don't like I clean my house, I cook supper, I do laundry, and after somebody say you don't clean nicely. And my brother-in-law argue with me yesterday so much. Before my husband say to me stop, but yesterday he didn't say to me anything. And he said to my father-in-law she is tired, she comes from school, she want to watch T.V. She is always tired, she do nothing. And I said, "what time I told you I am tired? What time, can you tell me when I don't cook supper and go to sleep? He looked in my face after, and I said can you give me

> an example? And when I feel tired I don't tell anyone, I take my tablet and I cook supper and I go to sleep after. I can't sleep after. And my father said "yeah, she don't say anything when she is tired." All the time they make a big deal. That is why I am sick and tired of living there. But I don't know how he does it. If in India somebody if I do this and I don't want talk like this he don't talk either like this, but he fight after. (SURYA, Steven)

Surya continues saying that her husband's attitude toward her has changed since she started to learn English. Now that she is learning English, she is having more problems at home, which may bring her to quit school in order to get a job to get a home for herself and her husband.

> Before was O.K. He said you was quiet and really nice girl, and now you change. I said I no change, but now I can speak, before I couldn't speak. How I give you answer? My husband doesn't speak Punjab, and I no speak English. When I came I just spoke couple of words. My husband went last year to India, my family my brother-in-law speaks English in India, and my sisters can speak a little English. And just a little time can spend over there and I little speak. And when I came to here just a little talk. But now I cannot speak very good, but I can listen, I can understand and I can answer. But that is why I want to move now. But my husband said if you want move you try to find job and you can afford. I don't want to move and then after one month came back same house. If I move out that's it, I don't want come back. (SURYA, Steven)

Although women often mentioned the difficulty of finding time and the room to balance the family responsibilities with studying, the topic did not come up with the male students. This does not mean that it was not an issue, but rather that it did not arise in the interview. However, when the topic of family and time for homework came up with Carlos, he did not seem to have a problem.

> Carlos: I have three children. Family.
>
> Lori: Is it difficult for you to study, because you have three children and other things to do?
>
> Carlos: Difficult for my homework? No, not difficult because I have dictionary. For my homework I have time, sometimes I didn't my

> homework because I go out to play soccer, but (laughs)...
> (CARLOS, Darrell)

And later when I was talking to Carlos outside of his classroom, he said that he does not understand Canadian men, who let their wives go out drinking with their friends. He said that he can go out, but he would get very angry with his wife if she went out. She should stay home, because she is a wife and mother.

## Male and Female Teachers

The sex of the instructor was also mentioned by several students as having an effect on the classroom. Male teachers were often felt to be more serious and strict, whereas female teachers were said to be more caring and friendly. Carlos said that he thinks his present teacher is a better teacher, but he liked his first teacher because she was very friendly.

> The first class was, this class is better for my teacher. Is better the teacher, but the first class is better because the teacher was very happy. She played we singing, it is different. But now is serious the class. I understand because the teacher is man. The other teacher is a woman. Is different. ... In other class everybody was singing songs, and but now no. Only study. The teacher is different. I think some the women because they have feelings but the man is more serious. Not *serious*, but serious. This is my concept, my opinion. Because women have more feelings for teaching than men. Men are more serious, it seems, a little rigid. [Porque la mujer tiene más sentimientos para enseñar que el hombre. El hombre es más serio parece, un poco rigido.] Maybe controlled. (CARLOS, Darrell)

Aisha has a difficult situation because she is divorced and has a daughter living in Lebanon. The daughter is living with her father, Aisha's ex-husband, who, according to the law in Lebanon, gets custody of the children. Aisha said that "it is life and we have to continue. It is no good to feel bad all time, you have to continue to live." When I asked her if she talked to Steven about this, Aisha

said that she does not. Nevertheless, she had mentioned this to her first teacher, who was a woman. Aisha said she does not know why she mentioned it to her first teacher and not to Steven.

> Aisha: I don't talk about my problem with this teacher. I talked about it with the last teacher and she helped me very much. But with this teacher I don't talk. Maybe no time. Maybe no time.
>
> Lori: Is it difficult to talk about it?
>
> Aisha: Yeah. The first time I came to school and they asked me are you married and I have to explain, how to explain. I feel embarrassed how to explain how to tell it. Somebody doesn't understand you why you left your daughter, why get divorced. But nobody knows about you terrible life. Nobody knows your life. The first time it was very difficult for me but now I feel very comfortable. It is natural everyone happen some day what happen to me with him. Nobody knows about his life or about the future. (AISHA, Steven)

Gnoc, however, prefers male teachers to female teachers. She says that she found female teachers to be less approachable.

> I like teacher Darrell, man teacher better. Because they help me. Something I don't like woman teacher like Hmmmm, Hmmmm [she puts her head up and looks down her nose as she makes the noise of a "smug" person]. Makes me shy. Yeah. Man teacher is easier for me. Very shy, and why? (GNOC, Darrell)

## Summary

Although some students initially said there were no differences or no problems between the men and women in the classroom, it may be that many students looked at gender differences as a matter of being better or worse in the classroom, and did not want to make a value judgment. The fact that they could, at other points in the interview, mention differences or difficulties they have due to their sex shows that they are aware of the issues, even if they may not express them as such. The complexities which arise due to the varied cultural backgrounds of the students make it difficult to examine gender as a distinct entity, for sex roles vary within varied cultural contexts. Following will be an examination of the cultural dimension of the ESL classroom.

## Culture

In the ESL classrooms in this study, the students came to Canada from many different countries and have many different cultural backgrounds. Although in Darrell's class there was a larger proportion of Vietnamese students than other nationalities, the students came from a wide range of countries. This poses interesting challenges, as well as advantages, for both the instructors and students. Students seemed to be more aware of possible differences related to cultural differences than to other factors, perhaps because this was an area covered in the curriculum. Following are some of the main ideas expressed by students as to how they feel similar or different cultural, ethnic, or linguistic backgrounds affect their learning. Student' feelings towards cultural differences also ranged widely. Some students felt very strongly about some differences, while others felt that they were not an issue.

### People are People

Even though differences were recognized, some students felt that they did not affect them. Many of these students stated that the world is full of many different kinds of people and that they enjoyed meeting them, regardless of their background. The students demonstrated an open-mindedness which is admirable, because many had come from relatively homogeneous societies, or societies in conflict related to ethnic or religious difference. Sergei, from war-torn Yugoslavia for example, felt that although there are some difficulties when we meet new people, this happens regardless of country or race.

> People is people. It doesn't matter what country. Sometimes, you know sometimes is difficult, but usually no. If somebody good man doesn't matter what kind of country, doesn't matter what colour. (SERGEI, Steven)

It was also expressed that what is inside people is important. That is because people are a compilation of body parts, and it is the way people think that is interesting. Eva was a very outgoing student and enjoyed speaking with everyone in her class, and we had some very interesting conversations in addition to the interviews. She often said that she did not understand why some people would be afraid to talk to new people, but she could sympathize with them. Eva was one of the two most talkative students in Carol's class, and perhaps it has something to do with her attitude toward meeting new people.

> I am not afraid to meet new people, because people are people everywhere. They have two legs, two hands, one head, but the strange thing may be what they have in their brain; this is the surprise. But after you talk with someone and watch, you can put in this category or this category. (EVA, Carol)

For other students, the fact that everyone had all come to Canada means that everyone has something in common. The students are all there to learn English, and therefore differences are inconsequential. In fact Helena, another outgoing student, feels that the differences contribute to the classroom as a learning environment, in that everyone can speak about their own self and their experiences. Therefore, although she initially says that there are no differences, she continues by saying that she likes when people speak about themselves, and provides an example of how "people from Vietnam have very nice story about how they came to Canada." On occasion students' stories have touched the other students, and they would share their stories in spite of the different backgrounds.

> I don't think so. Everyone needs to work together. We spoke every time about every body's country. It is good, conversation very good. I like to speak about me or when somebody speaks about self. It is very interesting, because when Cam spoke about her story about how she came to Canada, everyone was crying. Can you believe it? She is from Vietnam, and people from Vietnam have very nice story about how they came to Canada. Very interesting, very sad. (HELENA, Steven)

For many students, the cultural differences were not important. The desire to learn English and to get to know one another outweigh any challenges which may exist due to cross-cultural differences.

## Pronunciation Problems

Perhaps the most frequent comment regarding cultural differences related to pronunciation. Many students complained about, and even said that they did not want to work with, certain students because of their accent. Many students felt that they could not learn to speak English correctly if they speak with people who make mistakes, and especially in relation to pronunciation. Even those who enjoy speaking with their classmates, regardless of the accent, admit that communication can be hindered if the speech is unintelligible. For example, Ping from Carol's class said that everyone tries to speak to one another, but that sometimes it is difficult to understand one another because of the interference from their first language.

> The teacher gives us many chances to speak to each other, but because we are from difficult, different countries. I speak Chinese. They are different language, when they talk it is difficult to understand. Some word they don't understand, some words I don't understand. But we try to talk. (PING, Carol)

In some instances, however, students became frustrated and angry if they could not understand or be understood. Students would avoid speaking with people with whom they did not like to speak, and sometimes would not listen to their partner if they were placed together. Occasionally on these instances the teacher would step in and negotiate communication between the students, with varied degrees of success. Although this was not prevalent in the classrooms, I noticed it several times during my observations. In the interviews, Adriana felt that if she could not understand someone because of their pronunciation, sometimes they would get angry.

> I like talking to partner, but when the other person is Chinese I don't understand some words because the pronunciation is not good, and I have a problem and the people Chinese gets angry and my answer sometimes not correct, then like this. (ADRIANA, Darrell)

As can be seen in the quote from Adriana above, if someone commented on pronunciation problems, students from Asian countries were often cited as having the most difficult accents to understand. Difficulties appeared in all classes, although they were most pronounced in the lower level classes. Because of the different language backgrounds in the classrooms, there are varying degrees of accents due to the interference between these languages and English. When students can not understand one another, the instructor may also need to play a role in assisting comprehension. Marec, from Darrell's class, mentioned that students come from different countries, and thus speak differently, and that it appears more difficult for students from Eastern countries [Asia].

> Oh, yeah it is different, different from other countries. Maybe speak different. Accent or little accent. Little speaking. Teacher much help. Maybe more difficult students from East countries. (MAREC, Darrell)

Not understanding one's partner could make some students feel uncomfortable. With time, the ability to understand one another seems to increase, perhaps also due to the occasional assistance of the instructor. When I asked Ivana (from Lebanon) if she liked working with partners, she said it is sometimes difficult to understand students from Vietnam or China, but not from Europe. At first, she did not feel comfortable working in groups, but says that now she feels better.

> Sometimes difficult with partner because often I don't understand Vietnamese, Chinese. Very difficult for me. But European people I understand. ...Now I feel comfortable, but before no. I don't feel comfortable. Teacher come with my group and speaking and another group. (IVANA, Steven)

Some students felt that Chinese students were afraid to speak because of their accents, and Europeans are not shy. The fear of making mistakes, together with the discomfort of other students, could result in increased quietness and shyness of these students. Ivan from Darrell's class stated that the Chinese and Vietnamese are the same, and appear to have similar pronunciation difficulties. Koreans, on the other hand, are more intelligible. However, it is also important to note that the Korean in this class was a highly educated business woman, while the Vietnamese and Chinese had lower levels of previous education.

> Every student Chinese is quiet. The Chinese people are very quiet but mainly they have afraid for the speak. For they accent. Europeans not shy. In this class only Chinese is one but for men, for me Chinese and Vietnamese the same, but the Korean people speak English well. They have not good accent, but not the same Chinese. (IVAN, Darrell)

It is important to point out that it was not only students from outside Asia who commented on Asian students' difficulties with pronunciation. Many students from China and Vietnam also mentioned their difficulties with English and the pronunciation. Tuyet, from Vietnam, also said that students from countries outside of Asia have an advantage when they are learning English.

> I think Vietnamese not listen not very well, as good as Lebanon students. Um, many country not Asia. I think Asia, Vietnamese, Chinese, or Kampuchea or any country in Asia different. I think not good, as Poland and those countries. (TUYET, Steven)

One of the possible reasons for this, in addition to the teaching styles which predominate these countries as discussed in the previous section, could be the degree of contrast between English and the Asian languages. The Vietnamese alphabet uses roman letters, but the pronunciation of those letters differs from those in English. Literate students from Cambodia also utilized Roman letters similar to the way it was used in Vietnam. The Chinese and Korean alphabets consist of thousands of characters, each of which carries its own meaning and sound. The grammatical structures and form of presenting ideas also vary greatly between English and Asian languages, so this could also

be a factor. Therefore, maybe students who come from countries with languages which more greatly resemble English may have fewer difficulties with English and English pronunciation. Joseph from Steven's class mentions that it may be because there is greater difference between the first language and English.

> Oh yeah, for learn is different because many languages, from Europe is maybe Slovakia language is easier to translate because many words is adopted from English. For people from Japanese, Vietnam or China, is very hard because there is nothing the same as English, different letters, different words. For me from Poland, how for Japanese, easier. Some people, like India, there is easier because some in college is in English. I am little lower. (JOSEPH, Steven)

The difficulty in pronunciation appeared to be more noticeable in lower level classes. Although there were some problems in higher level classes, they were not seen as problematic. In fact some students would point out that in previous classes (lower levels) some students had very poor pronunciation, but in their current class students from the same countries had much more comprehensible English. For instance, Ilona, from Alicia's class, mentioned the difference between her current and previous class in this regard. This led her to believe that what was at issue related more to individual difficulties rather than with the country of origin. However, when we notice that non-Chinese or Vietnamese students are usually seen as having more intelligible English, the first language must play some role.

> Yeah, yeah, here more from Europe. My old class was more Chinese. I have no problem with Chinese woman or man, and here in this class Lee from Taiwan, Hoa from Vietnam, and my neighbour -- I don't know his name -- from Vietnam same. Speak very clear, but in my old class it was very difficult. Very quiet, and slowly and I don't understand nothing. In language lab it was very bad. Do you know that sometimes we talk to other students with earphones but I can't understand. But not everybody. I think it is not country problem, I think it is personal problem. I think it is country plus person. But little, I know what say this woman [indicating Hoa]. I was two levels together. But she speaks clearly. (ILONA, Alicia)

However, Varina, from Alicia's class, in response to a question in regards to differences between the sexes, responded that there was no difference in terms of male and female, but that differences did exist in terms of country of origin.

> Men, women, no. Sometimes I think better Polish people, Hungary people. I think pronunciation is better than Chinese people. I can't think maybe first level, second level put together I am with Polish people many time, and pronunciation I am understand, but Chinese people very difficult. Maybe my partner every day Chinese partner, teacher change change. Maybe no good when ten Chinese or ten Vietnamese I think, but one or two Vietnamese, no problem. (VARINA, Alicia)

## Common Tongues

Within the school, there were usually several students who spoke the same first language, or came from the same country. Having a common first language could be seen as both an advantage and disadvantage. Within the classroom, students could assist one another in understanding difficult concepts, but it could also result in students conversing in their first language rather than practicing English. It is common for students who speak the same first language to speak together in that language, because it feels natural and sometimes they can understand better if someone explains in their first language. Other students might resent students not speaking English, as it is a distraction. Hee Soon, from Darrell's class, felt that there should not be so many students from the same country (her class had six women from Vietnam). She said that the students speak their language during the class, which she finds very noisy. Furthermore, when she asks them to speak English, they appear to get upset. She felt that the teachers should play a greater role in controlling the language used in the classroom. At another point in the interview, she stated that there are not enough rules and that "students are too free."

> One class too many one country students. My class ten weeks my class is nine Chinese. Very, very noisy. Their country language is very, very noisy. Then I say please be quiet, please speak English. They don't like. Then I didn't say anything else. Very, very. Teacher don't know. Coffee break, lunch time. This school is students don't

> pay, government is pay for me. We students should, Darrell say, we should change seat every day. On board he writes "Please another seat, find it." I think another country. Beside same country a little bit noisy. Not English. Teachers controls, we can't control. (HEE SOON, Darrell)

However, as mentioned above, some students do like having other students who speak the same language in class, because they could explain using their first language when they did not understand. Although this seemed easier for the students initially, it could cause them to rely on their first language, and stop them from working at understanding or thinking in English. Ping, for example, likes having some Chinese students in her class because they can explain words she does not understand.

> Ping: Carol speak English slowly for us, but sometimes many words I don't understand.
>
> Lori: What do you do if you don't understand?
>
> Ping: There are many Chinese in class so I ask them to tell me.
>
> Lori: Do you ask the teacher?
>
> Ping: Because some words is difficult understand, I don't know you try to tell me, but sometimes is too difficult. Usually I ask other Chinese people. (PING, Carol)

For some students it was frustrating when someone spoke to them in their own language. They saw it not only as distracting, but also as disadvantageous for learning English. Some students would ask other students to explain concepts they could not understand in their own language, but other students received these explanations unsolicited and unwanted. For example, Adriana said that she does not like it when Ivan speaks to her in Spanish, for she becomes confused as to whom to listen to.

> Like sometimes talk with Ivan, and he talk and talk in Spanish and I don't learn English. When I don't understand some words in the pizarrón ... [blackboard] ... yeah, blackboard, ah he explain it to me.

> He talk and the teacher explanation and I don't know who to listen. It is bad for me and hard for teacher. (ADRIANA, Darrell)

In addition, some students feel it is good to have students from many countries because otherwise they would feel more inclined to speak their own language. If only a couple students spoke the same language, they would be more prone to communicate in English out of respect for the other students. Similarly, the goal in an ESL classroom is to study English. Ping said that although we may eat different food and come from different countries, all students need to learn English, and with the passing generations we may become more alike.

> I think it is good, because if we all came from China sometimes we speak Chinese more often than English. Because we come from different countries we have to speak English. We come from different countries we must know we have different, how think, so I have different habits. I think you different, I think you different. Sometimes we speak, food is different, but in Canada. We all in Canada. We eat rice, bread more. But children eat Lebanese. (PING, Carol)

Having no one in the classroom who speaks the same first language is often seen as an advantage, as there is no temptation to speak it. Ho, the only Chinese student in Darrell's classroom, is happy that students come from many different countries because then he needs to speak in English. Otherwise, he said, he would speak Chinese.

> I talk sometimes. Because in my class me only one Chinese. Vietnamese, Polandese, Korea. Me only one Chinese. We all talk English before class. If many speak Chinese, I speak Chinese. Because English we are no talking, listen understand. Speak Chinese. Many different countries is good. Only language English can talk. (HO, Darrell)

For some students, it is also nice to have diverse first languages because they can practice listening to difficult accents and become better attuned. If they

only hear one accent, then students could find it difficult to understand someone speaking with a different accent. Tuyet said that after speaking with people who have difficult accents, she can now understand everyone better because she has learned how to listen.

> I think good for me because some of the persons different. Yeah, maybe you speak I hear easy, but somebody speak difficult for me listen, you know but I hear many people different countries speak different. If I speak with a person difficult listen but I listen good. After I hear a person listen easy, now easy for me. (TUYET, Steven)

Speaking in one's first language provides the possibility to express opinions and complex ideas which may be beyond the student's English repertoire. For example, Joseph said that outside class he tends to speak with students who speak the same language for they can discuss a problem for which they lack the vocabulary or grammatical structures in English.

> Lori: Is there someone easier for you to talk to?
>
> Joseph: No, ah Polish guy. Because they understand, if there is a hard problem, we can discuss between us.
>
> Lori: Do you talk in English or Polish?
>
> Joseph: Oh, no. Because it is difficult to discuss, because easier understand how we discuss in Polish, not too often because some words some sentence can't understand in English because the meaning is different. (JOSEPH, Steven)

## Learning About One Another's Culture

There were segments of the class when students shared information about the countries of origin or customs of the other students. Students spoke to the other students about various aspects of their life before they came to Canada. Many of the students mentioned the positive side of this activity, in that they

could gain knowledge about other countries, people, and their customs, and it helped them understand one another better. For Gan, it was also valuable to talk about his country, although he did not like to talk about his language.

> I learn about some new language, Polish and China. It is interesting. Just know how to say some things. I don't like to talk about Vietnamese in the class, my language I don't like. I like talk about my country. I feel proud. I feel it is good for everybody to learn about my country. My country is not a rich country so I talk about the truth in my country, how is the people, how is the life, how is education. I think they understand me. If each country has different situation. (GAN, Alicia)

Eva, for example, enjoys the diversity in the class because she could learn about other traditions and cultures.

> Eva: I like because you can hear lots of new tradition or culture.
>
> Lori: Do you learn a lot about new cultures?
>
> Eva: Yeah, Tai Chi from teacher, Fun, or from Zarifa the girl from Sudan. She can told us about a wedding is done, or we hear about the twenty or thirty years ago. I didn't know the Chinese can have lot of women. I only knew Muslim can have lot of women but Chinese, I was surprise. She has three mother and one father. For me it was a big, big surprise. And I like to learn from everybody. You can learn if you want and you can choose what is bad and what is good to take from everybody some things. (EVA, Carol)

Krysta enjoys learning about the different students, and hearing about the different students helps explain some of their behaviour to her.

> Krysta: I think very interesting. For example Linda, Linda is very very religious and I think she is very different from me. I am, sometimes I think, "Oh, my God she is very quiet, she is shy." But I think she when if she like be quiet be religious, whatever, is her choice.
>
> Lori: Do you find students from different countries act differently?

Krysta: In this class not different. In my class before, yeah. I had two friends from India, but maybe two girls and they talked to me about their marriage and for me it is very interesting, but I can't live like them. But for me I love learning all things, very interesting. (KRYSTA, Alicia)

Talking about their home countries can be hard on some students, especially if they left important people behind.

Aisha: Very interesting it is. Sometimes you know about new countries, new attitudes, new things -- it is very interesting.

Lori: Do you do many presentations about different countries?

Aisha: Yeah, but I feel sad when I talk about my own country. My country is very important to me, and the first one because it is my country and second because I left my daughter there. It is very important for me. And sometimes I feel so bad and I feel so nervous because it is fighting in my country, and my country was very beautiful country and all of the visitors came to my country to visit the beautiful weather and beautiful place and after fighting everything change and it is not beautiful. It is good. And because I left my daughter, it is very important to me because some day I want to go visit my daughter. (AISHA, Steven)

Being exposed to different cultures before coming to the diverse classroom did not seem to diminish the interest; however, it does seem to decrease feelings of homesickness and culture shock.

Lori: Do you enjoy learning about different countries?

Ching: Yes. For example, Eva taught us a Romanian dance and Zarifa from Sudan taught us about their country in Sudan, and I don't have culture shock. And I don't have homesick. I think maybe I was long time in Germany or Japan, and then because maybe I left China a long time ago. I don't have homesick and don't have culture shock. I like having different culture together. (CHING, Carol)

Problems sometimes arise in the classroom due to differences and the teacher would sometimes need to step in. Bing, for instance, stated that discussion of culture can sometimes cause disagreements, so the teacher needed to intervene.

> Culture. Very interesting, because we have a culture lesson. I think interesting. Because one time student they have their culture, like Moslem different. And one student is Moslem and another student from another Moslem and disagree. At the time they disagree and nobody can speak. I can't speak that, so Carol stopped them. Carol said, don't think so. Here is Canada, everything is freedom. . . Is culture, yes, I think is different. I think our class maybe is different. We learn to speak English not spend many time to talk about culture. Because the different culture you say no problem and they say problem. So sometimes is problem, because different countries. I don't like that. At that time, oh, very problem. And Carol said "don't say that." (BING, Carol)

## Culturally Sensitive Topics

Although teachers may try very hard to present topics which are sensitive to the student population, it may be difficult to consider all possible student responses to the topics introduced. Zelimer, from Alicia's class, discussed this issue, relating to his background as a Bosnian refugee, in a classroom with Serbians; the one he refers to is Varina, a Serbian nurse.

> Zelimer: Every Monday we have a topics list, and I think the topics are maybe not good enough. I will tell you, for example, I am from Bosnia, and in this class we have some people from Serbia, Ukrainian. And in this class we must write about our country. We are here for different reasons, and can't write normally. Because I, for example, am refugee, and she isn't, and it might make a problem. I am refugee and reason why I am here is different than for Varina. She is normal immigrant. I am here because of Serbs and we can't have topics. We can't write the same things. Some topics are not good.
>
> Lori: Why?

Zelimer: It is possible problems between us. Maybe in other class no. I think this is difficult situation for the teacher to understand, and I think teacher maybe doesn't understand.

Lori: Is there a way the teacher could understand better?

Zelimer: No, I know this is Canada, and it is a new country, and it is too difficult. I will show you for example these topics. Describe your job in your country. You know I can't because I am refugee. Describe one happy experience and one unhappy experience. Write about most beautiful place you have been. Describe the city or town you lived in. Well for example, my city twenty-five thousand killed by Serbs for three months. Some things are very hard write. I think in our class I and Irina, we are from Bosnia. We are refugees. I like write composition, it is difficult choose composition because we must speak about composition in class. (ZELIMER, Alicia)

Varina, the student mentioned as being Serbian by Zelimer, also discussed some of the difficulties between Muslims and Serbs in Yugoslavia. Outside the interview also mentioned that Bosnians and Serbs were together in the class, but that this was not an issue for her.

Yeah, Yugoslavia there is a war. War. I worked in the hospital. Wow, every night come twenty or thirty patients. Every night. Ambulance, wew, wew, wew, wew [sound of ambulance]. I worked as X-Ray technician. One year my hospital, more hospital. I like it. Emergency room. Only Serbian patients. Sometimes Muslim and many many problems with these patients, because other soldiers, Serbian soldiers. Muslim soldiers, but Muslim soldiers killed his mother and killed his sister. But Red Cross says no religion, no race. Patient is patient. Very difficult. I help sometimes, but sometimes my soldier see me and maybe angry. But before this Muslim man, I know who is. And together drink coffee and work together. And now, strange. I think never finish this problem. (VARINA, Alicia)

Perhaps what the Red Cross has asked them to do is similar to what we expect in the classroom: to forget their religion, race and disagreements. This ignores the background of the students and does not deal with any of the issues which may exist. What Zelimer suggested is to provide more topics which do

not necessarily relate to student history and which may bring up uncomfortable memories or possible resentment in a classroom.

## Discord Due to Difference

Although most students stated that the differences due to culture are "no problem," some students admitted that sometimes they did not understand one another, and that some behaviours (which were acceptable to one student) were inappropriate. Ching said that sometimes it is difficult due to the occasional lack of understanding.

> Sometimes it is very difficult. Because like some students I don't understand them what do they think. And sometimes I think we make a misunderstand. And the people in our class is not the same education, not the same country, and so it is difficult. (CHING, Carol)

What a student learned as acceptable behaviour can influence their perception of other students' behaviour. The rules the students learned to be acceptable can have a strong influence in their participation, for the students may not be inclined to speak or to ask questions. It can also cause them to look at the behaviour of other students and express disapproval. Aurora, for example, had a strict upbringing in which etiquette and manners were formally taught, and she found the behaviour of some students inappropriate, especially Rurik.

> The one I talk to you about, I think I don't know what is matter. He is not good manner and have good conduct. When I was a small that is the one I forgot. The last I don't speak very well. When I was a little, my father is Chinese. My father teach me how to walk, how to eat. Yeah. My sister and brother. In our school, uh, we have eight books on good manners and conduct. We read that. Yeah, the child read that. When I am, I think fifteen, that is no more. The book revised. The old book. (AURORA, Darrell)

Lee said that the behavioural differences in the classroom were not understandable. For her, some actions were not acceptable, and she felt bothered that other students did not follow the same rules as she.

> Sometimes when teacher is teaching, some people when they want to speak they like to speak and they don't mind teacher is teaching. They don't think now teacher is teaching, we can not speak. But they don't think so. If teacher is speaking I must be quiet. Because we must to listen and by other people they think, "I have idea I want to speak, so I must to speak." I think different, it is true, but I don't think that because I don't mind and I don't remember. One thing. One time we buy flowers for gift my other teacher because this course is finished. And we have four people go to buy flowers they think six is not good, three is good. Three flowers together or five flowers together. But in my country we usually put three, six or seven or eight, but never five. Five in our country is bad meaning. Four is bad meaning. I explain, but four people and two people they agree. They have same culture so I keep quiet. (LEE, Alicia)

Later in the interview Lee added that she felt that there were many differences which she "can't figure out." And the differences can make her feel uncomfortable, which leads to her staying quiet. Since she feels students should not interrupt the teacher, and her discomfort makes her stay quiet, for students who do not feel the same as she will have many more opportunities to speak in class.

> How to say. Sometimes in my country now I can't figure out. I know many things is different. Some in my country, many student students can't call teacher's name, they must speak teacher name by their family name, but here we call by first name. First time I come here I feel very strange. And some people when we eat anything and some people they like to try to eat, but in my country we don't do that. In my country are very modest. In my country, but in here like nothing. And sometimes we speak something is not good, maybe joke and they don't mind. But in class all Chinese people, I think they mind. So many things different. Just a little difficult, but is not a big problem. Sometimes if I feel not comfortable I don't like to speak. I just keep quiet. And I think not very often, just sometimes. (LEE, Alicia)

Some cultural differences may be behaviours which we may not consider disturbing to students. For example, to Zarifa from the Sudan, the volume of students' voices bother her. Outside of the taped interview she added that she felt that often the teacher did not hear her because her voice was soft, and loud students would cause her to feel like being quiet.

> I like it, because I can learn many things from many cultures. Sometimes difficult, understanding. The way they are speaking, their behaviour. Yeah, sometimes they speak very loud. They make me bother, but some of them speak quieter. Not very loud, but some of them speak very loud. (ZARIFA, Carol)

And students sometimes felt negative feelings directed towards themselves. Adriana, for example, said that she realizes that when she eats in class, which she needs to do because she is pregnant, some students look uncomfortable.

> Adriana: Many things are different. Um, when I eat, no se sienten bien [they do not feel well]. Yeah, some people is angry when they have different things, and in my country is this and in my country is this. But only words, only argue, no physical.
>
> Lori: What happens?
>
> Adriana: Teacher says don't worry, don't worry, relax. (ADRIANA, Darrell)

## Participation Levels

Some students felt that levels of participation were related to their country of origin. Carlos said that he felt that Asians speak less, and Europeans speak more.

> Carlos: More, the same, but sometimes I speak to the person for a speak because no everybody like speak because the some people very quiet.
>
> Lori: Who is quiet?

> Carlos: The people from Vietnamese, Chinese, Orientals they speak little. Polish, Yugoslav, people Europe, I think the people Europe speak more in class than the people oriental. I see they very quiet. I don't know. (CARLOS, Darrell)

Bing, from Carol's class, had said that he felt he did not speak hardly at all in the classroom; however, he felt that the Vietnamese spoke even less. This he found especially strange, because at least one person was a teacher before coming to Canada, and teaching is a profession in which one needs to speak.

> Our class is twenty three. I think Vietnam speak less than me. I think their teacher, their job they should speak a lot. Because I only work in laboratory, no speak. But they speak less than me. And one is teacher before they came to Canada, but a teacher maybe speak a lot. (BING, Carol)

Some students did not feel that culture made any difference in the participation. Ping cites the contrast between students of the same country of origin and their desire to speak or to be silent.

> Chinese people like to speak, some Egyptian like to speak. Some Chinese don't like to speak, some Egyptians don't like to speak. (PING, Carol)

## Summary

For the students the multicultural make up of the class brought with it both advantages and disadvantages. Diversity brought with it the opportunity to learn about other customs, other countries, and other experiences. It also brought with it different behavioural expectations, which at times could cause tension or arguments among students. Pronunciation problems due to first language interference could also cause strife, especially for the students who had unintelligible accents, with whom other students disliked working. Being exposed to students from different countries and with different accents provided

some students with the opportunity to learn about and become familiarized with some of the differences.

## Age

As I walked into the four classrooms, I noticed that although the students were all adults, their ages ranged from about 20 years of age to about 60. Because learning capacity is thought to change with the aging process, and degree of maturity and life experience would also vary, I wondered to what extent the students perceived any differences within their classroom either for themselves or for other students. The responses ranged as widely as the ages, with some students feeling there was no difference while others felt that differences existed. Often, students would state that there was "no problem" with the different ages in the classroom, but would later mention differences which did exist.

For example, some felt that younger students have an advantage because younger students were seen as having better memories, fewer responsibilities outside the classroom, and not as much time had passed since they were last in a classroom. Others stated that it is desirous to have various ages in the classroom, because of the variety of interests which are introduced to the lessons, as well as the energy which the younger students bring to the classroom.

### Relevance of Age

Students often noted that a range of student ages did exist in the classroom, but that this made no difference for either themselves or for other students. Helen attributed the lack of difference to the fact that all of the people

in the classroom were students. Therefore, they were all there to learn English, talk to one another, and that age is irrelevant to this process.

> Many students in the class are older than me, and younger, but I don't think so makes any difference. At lunch time we spoke together we laughing, we good. I like study English, I like go to school. (HELENA, Steven)

## Advantage: Youth

Differences were seen in the amount that older and younger students spoke in the classes. Although they often did not provide an explanation for the differences, students from both the higher and lower level classes felt that younger students spoke more and better than older students.

> I think young student talk very very good. Yeah, older student talk little bit than younger students. Younger students talk is good and more. Older students no. (LAN, Darrell)

> Age, not important. But sometimes I see a man who learn when he is young is easier than when he is older. I think the younger intelligent. But I am not sure. (ZARIFA, Carol)

The amount spoken was not the only difference, in that older students were seen to learn with greater difficulty than younger students. Arif, a younger student, says that he feels younger students speak better and with less difficulty than older students, but do not speak with confidence. Interestingly, in answering the question, Arif demonstrated a characteristic of many of the younger students in the classroom, questioning their own authority.

Arif: Young is little better than older. Older is learning harder. Younger is easier. Older student is a little more hard. Older. But younger is speaking good. I don't know, this is my idea.

Lori: Do you see this in your class?

Arif: I notice that a student who is older speak more difficult. Maybe I didn't understand them, maybe my mistake, but for me older people are talking harder. Younger is better. (ARIF, Carol)

Some of the differences could be attributed to the aging process. As a person ages, some of the senses and reflexes may become impaired. This could pose some challenges for older students and decrease their ability to participate fully in the classroom. In contrast, younger students would have an advantage, for they would be still relatively agile.

I think the student like in Asia, like the old student. Get more difficult for them because reaction - I don't know how explain - they older student get more difficult in listening or speaking in class. (CHING, Carol)

I thing it is good for me, I am young. I have good memory, I think it is good for me to study English. (PING, Carol)

Aspects of students' lives outside of the classroom can also influence the participation in the classroom. Although Irina says that she feels that she forgets her problems when she gets in the classroom, she also thinks that, in general, older people, such as herself, have more problems than younger people. These problems may distract students and inhibit them from concentrating time and mental energy on their studies.

I think when it is a person younger, she has more chance to fast study something. Maybe, I dunno. Because some young person has a more problem than older person, but usually older person (pointing to self) has more problems than younger person. But, I dunno, I have experience with my niece or nephews. They learn so quickly, but I forgot just my problem when I came in the class. And I have a very nice class here, and you see. (IRINA, Alicia)

Some of the advantage for young people, as Irina expressed above, may be due to the amount of responsibility students have outside of class. This would infringe on the time for study, so that persons who did not have family or housekeeping duties would have more time to study and practice.

> Some people have family, children, husband and wife. I am children in family. They need to do a lot of housework, but if I do housework, my mother and father are very happy I can do. But they must do. I have time to read book, listen, study. They have not. I think after class they have a lot of things to do, but I have much time to study. I think I am luckier than them. (PING, Carol)

Another factor which may play a role for older and younger students is the time which has passed since they were last in school. Some students were still in school or university, or had recently graduated, when they left their countries and came to Canada. Others had completed few years of formal education or completed a degree, but a long time prior to attending the ESL classroom. For the latter students, an added challenge existed in learning to be a student again, especially for those students, such as Aurora, who had very little formal education in the Philippines.

> For me I am not going to be a student. I just, stopped a long time ago, but I like to learn that's why I am here. ...Sometimes I cannot write, I don't know how to do. Like I am saying, like that. It is hard for me I think, maybe older and it is long time ago did not go to school, but I like to learn more English, sometimes I did not know, did not understand like this, like that. And I am just listening. I don't understand the meaning of like that, so I dictionary and sometimes I am just listening. Always listening, I understand some, but I don't speak. (AURORA, Darrell)

In Carol's intermediate level class, however, some students noted exceptions to the fact that younger students have an advantage. For instance, Ching, a student from Carol's class who appeared to pay great attention to what was happening in the classroom, felt that younger students did not speak as much as older students.

Older students speak more than younger students. (CHING, Carol)

Bing, also from Carol's class, also points out that it may be easier for some younger students, but some older students had learned many languages and were well educated. For these students the advantage did not necessarily go to the younger students.

> Younger easier than older students? Some but not all. Because some student older than me, but they can speak ah different languages -- Japanese or Russian. He speak five languages. He was engineer. Now he is retired. (BING, Carol)

Eva from Carol's class said that "age makes a difference if you are a child." Nevertheless, she points out that the two eldest students "try so hard," which implies some greater effort on their part. They are seen as learning together with the younger students, but that the learning requires greater effort.

> I watch Jiamin, the woman, the woman of 60 years, and Wei he have 60, and they try so hard. It makes me so happy. (EVA, Carol)

In fact, it may be the extreme age differences which are most apparent in a classroom. The oldest and youngest students may stand out and provide the benchmark for other students. Ilona from Alicia's class mentions that in her current class the range of ages is not as large as her previous class, so age may not be as much of an issue.

> I don't think age makes a difference. In my old class oldest student 59 years old. Here I don't think so nobody, and was 19 in my class. In this class I think everybody 20 - 40. Not so big of a difference. I am 41 I have a 21 year old daughter. (ILONA, Alicia)

## Oldest and Youngest

Along the same line, the oldest and youngest students in classrooms seem to feel the age difference, or at least notice the fact that they are the youngest and oldest. In the lower level classes, being the youngest seemed to be more notable, whereas in the two higher level classes, the students did not feel as great an importance in being youngest. I was not able to interview the youngest student from Steven's classroom, but Aisha did comment on her.

> It is interesting because have youngest in the class. She talk about Mickey Mouse and we call her Mickey Mouse. She is very good. Sometimes very interesting, because your mind for thirty years old not like mind of twenty years old. Sometimes someone with mind seventeen years old make something funny. It is good for them to say I didn't make something wrong, but for me sometimes something wrong. (AISHA, Steven)

As with Arif's quote above, where I mentioned the lack of authority with which the younger students speak, the youngest students in Darrell and Carol's classroom spoke to me with obvious shyness, even though Ping did not feel that being the youngest had any effect on her. They both held their heads down as they spoke, giggled nervously at times, and spoke with hushed voices. Although this may have been due to other factors, such as their sex or cultural backgrounds, it is interesting to note that this behaviour was most apparent with these two students, who are the youngest in their class. Furthermore, for Ivan, who felt that age makes no difference in the class, he only noted one exception, Thuy, who is the youngest in his classroom.

> No, in my class there isn't any difference. Only one woman is younger, and I know is younger. I am 32. In my class I don't know how she is named, I don't know her name. . . Thuy. Maybe 20, young. (IVAN, Darrell)

Thuy, herself, said that being youngest did affect her. She felt that it sometimes prevented her from understanding or speaking with the teacher, even though she really wants to learn and speak English.

> I youngest in class, sometimes difficult because I don't understand about the teacher speaking and sometimes I no speaking with teacher... but sometimes good. I think, in class I youngest and I don't scare everybody. I don't scare. I speak English to everybody, because I want speak English too much. (THUY, Darrell)

In contrast, it was not an issue for Krysta to be the youngest in Alicia's class. Rather, she felt that she was freer here in Canada to talk with older students. Because she did not need to worry as much about the formalities, she could talk to students and also feel more of an equal .

> Lori: How old are you?
>
> Krysta: 22. I think I am the youngest.
>
> Lori: Is there any difference being the youngest?
>
> Krysta: No, you know in my country are many difference between people who are twenty and people who are thirty. Yeah, but I don't like it. I like in Canada is like free. Maybe Tanya is 38 I think. My mother is 42. But very different. Yeah, I like Tanya. In Poland I can't talk to older woman you say just name Tanya, but in Poland you must use like lady or last name. (KRYSTA, Alicia)

Although being the oldest did not seem to impact the students as greatly, students did recognize who was the oldest. I was not able to speak with the eldest student from Carol's class, and in Alicia's class there is no obvious "oldest" student, so it did not seem to have as great an impact. But in Steven's class Yasmeen notes that she is the oldest, but says it makes no difference for her.

> I am the oldest woman in the class. But it makes no difference. I feel the same. If you ask, student is student. If you old or young, the same. If you have more homework, you feel the same if you young or old. Because you are student. Everyone like to have something easy. (YASMEEN, Steven)

Aurora, the eldest in Darrell's classroom, saw herself as a mother figure. She looked after the younger students in the class, and saw it to be her role to reprimand a young male in the class who was extremely outspoken and who would often approach the young women in the classroom.

> You know the big guy always talking and talking, and he always going beside you. I don't like that guy. When I am already old, he always like that. I said, "I am your mother. I am already 63." "So I obey you, you are like my mother," he said. And the other ladies, yeah, he stopping them. "I don't like you stopping," I said. But not sorry, no matter. (AURORA, Darrell)

## Aged Interests

Different interest in topics could also influence the amount of participation in the class, and although many students said that everyone talks about the same topics, some students did feel that older and younger students are interested in different topics. The different interests and life experiences could also affect the understanding and willingness to talk between individuals, depending on how they perceive the differences. For some it is a problem, such as Gnoc and Sergei.

> I don't like too young, because no understand with me. Older understand, but younger no. I think younger students talk more. I no young, I old. Sometimes difficult. (GNOC, Darrell)

> I think this is problem, because if we talk about many things, I talk about my younger days, nineteen, seventeen. 1980 and others talk about 1935. No talk about the same things. Maybe I talk with their children, about something. (SERGEI, Steven)

Similarly, some students only feel inclined to speak when the topic is interesting to them. If the topic is not of interest, then the students may listen while the others speak.

Ping: Maybe how some older students speaking they are for example they talk about their children, their husbands. I only talk about something very interesting.

Lori: You talk about different subjects?

Ping: Yeah, some are different. Some are same. ... I think we are all friendly, sometimes we talk with my classmates we talk we speak something I think we have some things to talk, but sometimes we have different. They talk we learn, listen. So I am different. (PING, Carol)

Students may feel difficulties when speaking to students of a different age group, but not with students of the same age. For example, Chim describes both sides of the situation, in the difficulties he has speaking with older students, but in how much he enjoys speaking with Arif and Jamal, two young males of similar ages.

The first time I feel I am young. Just somebody, I go everyday to class and I think it is no problem for me. The class many students different age, but they can't help their appearance and sometimes the first time they tell some stories they are about them, and what happened. I like to listen to their stories. Sometimes I think the different age in the class, the old age they are quiet, but Jiamin, is the oldest in the class. She is very hard to talk about sports or something it is hard... Yeah, it is hard to talk to older students about sport and game. Different areas. (CHIM, Carol)

I was talking to Arif and Jamal, and they said some funny stories. I talk to everyone, but is often just talk to Arif and Jamal. Because talk with them stories very funny, and I like talking to them and telling stories. (CHIM, Carol)

The range of ages need not be great for students to feel that older and younger students have different topics of interest. In Alicia's class, for instance, where the students were from similar age groups, there were still some differences in interest areas noted.

I think almost all over twenty, but some people near middle age and different ages have different ideas for everything. So I think I am in

> this class middle age, so I everything I don't have any idea. I listen to young and their idea. (LEE, Alicia)

> Subject is some different or, yeah, is different, because older people talk more about job, about children about problems and children and something like that. But we have just one young person in our class, I know he has problems, but um I dunno he think more about fishing about a party or... (IRINA, Alicia)

Although Zelimer thinks what interests him would not interest older or younger people, he did not find this to occur in the classroom.

> I think what interesting me don't interested more younger or more older people than I am. But in this class, it isn't case. Maybe teacher reason, maybe English reason. We are here for study English and all is for it. (ZELIMIR, Alicia)

The amount of life experience a student has may also influence the topics they feel they can participate in, or the stories they have to share with other students. In fact, on many occasions, students said that others who are too young don't know enough about a topic to either converse about it or be interesting.

> Sometimes I feel a difference, but not often. Most of the questions in the book and exercises is about no age, not that big difference between, for example, one girl is seventeen and some like me is 55. Some question, not in this classroom. Was before. They don't know because they too young. They have no idea about life in this age. (JOSEPH, Steven)

## Youthfulness

Although young students may be seen to lack life experience, for some older students it is more enjoyable to be in a classroom with younger students.

Luba, for example, feels that it would be undesirable to have a class full of elderly students, and that it may be better for the older students to be with the younger students than vice versa. Similarly, in the classroom, one is removed from the responsibilities of home, and being together with younger students could result in the elder students feeling younger.

> Lori. Does age make any difference in the class?
>
> Luba. No, it is interesting when other classmates have different age. It is more funny maybe, because I am older. I am about 50. If all students about 50, maybe "wah" (yawning), maybe I would sleep. In our class we have a lot of students very young, twenty, twenty-two, twenty-five, and it is different more interesting. More interesting, I think. It is my point. Well, maybe it is not good for other students which is young.
>
> Lori. Why?
>
> Luba. Be with old people, but it is good for me. (LUBA, Alicia)

Similarly, some students felt younger when they were in class with younger people. The youthful energy appeared to be contagious, but the role of the student in the classroom sometimes allowed the older students to forget some of their domestic responsibilities, at least temporarily. This is expressed in the following quote from Azim.

> It is good to find various ages. It is very good, because more interesting. And I feel here as younger than I am. ...Yes, because outside the class I have children so I have to be father, but here I am a student so I feel younger. (AZIM, Alicia)

## Goals

Some of the younger students, especially those who were still in school or university in their homeland, aspired to continue their studies or obtain jobs

which were similar to those they had before. For the older students, the time it would take to learn the English and then re-educate themselves to become certified according to Canadian standards was prohibitive. These students often resigned themselves to occupations beneath their qualifications.

> Lori: How long did you go to university?
>
> Chim: Only first year, so the government the school board take me off the school so my father is soldier for the army, officer in the old army. So the school board did not allow me to continue my studies because my father was anti communist so my father is arrested and go to the prison. Afterwards I cannot continued my studies in the university.
>
> Lori: What were you studying?
>
> Chim: Medicine.
>
> Lori: Will you continue here?
>
> Chim: Oh, I am not sure, but learn English as well as I can, so I can continue here. (CHIM, Carol)

> Yes, sixteen years in a science institute. That's very good job for me. Very interesting for me. I worked in an office, accounting sometimes and draw picture for bridge. I tested bridges, old and new bridges. Different test and sometimes we went to country other city or village when builded new bridge. We tested it or old bridges we tested. Three or four days in other village. I don't think I can do that here. I think it is very special in Europe. I think here in Canada is other factories, other materials, other ways. It is different. And I am not so young. My people is not good here. I study English now. My English is not so good. Later I go to university and I will retire. (ILONA, Alicia)

Similarly, many students in the classes feel the need to learn English because they are living in a predominantly English speaking community. Unlike children who often study because someone has told them that they must, many of the students are attending the classes because they realize the relevance for themselves, which helps provide focus.

Yasmeen: Because all the students here know how they want. I want school for study English. I must listen, I must know everything.

Lori. You must?

Yasmeen. Yeah, and they learn by themselves, not from parents. It is true. (YASMEEN, Steven)

## Summary

We can, therefore, see how imbalances can arrive in the classroom, by looking at the preceding factors. What is difficult, however, is to go beyond the reductionist view of the individual aspects and see how they combine to produce accumulations of advantageous or disadvantageous characteristics. The factors of each individual are not themselves definitive either, as the individual is part of a larger group of students who all have their own attributes. There becomes a complex interweaving of the individual, the group, and the environment. Trends may emerge, but slight deviations can occur at any time. Individuals may be quieter or participate more depending on the topic or who their partners for small group work are, but overall, certain patterns hold true.

# Chapter V

## INSTRUCTOR RESPONSES: Factors influencing participation

### Introduction

The data collected from the teacher interviews are provided, separated by classroom. Although there is some overlap between the information presented by the instructors, each has his or her own perspective on the topics, often relating to the classroom they were currently instructing. In many instances, the interviews with the instructors provided further information about the relationship the students' backgrounds had on their participation and learning. The instructors forwarded a more global vision of the classroom, providing insights attained through their experience. Data collected from the instructor interviews provide an overview of issues, but also forward classroom strategies for enhancing the learning environment. Some issues recognized by students as influencing student learning, however, were not as familiar to the instructors. Therefore, although they existed in the classroom, the instructors felt that they had not given them due thought.

### Darrell

At the time of the interview, Darrell was the instructor of a Core E class, an upper beginner level. He had been teaching at the school for eight years, starting in the continuing education program and then switching to the full-time program. His career in ESL began when he studied English at the university and concurrently took some ESL courses. He had traveled extensively and felt ESL

would assist him in his travels. Upon completion of his undergraduate degree, he went to Nigeria, where he taught English for two years with CUSO. Upon returning to Canada, he began teaching ESL while erning a Bachelor of Education. After completing his formal education, Darrell said he kept up to date about instruction by attending the ESL conferences every year and by sharing ideas with his co-workers. During his years of experience instructing, he had taught many levels. At the time of the interview, he said he preferred mid-level and beginning students because "they are a lot keener. They haven't been here and been ground down, so they are still excited about it." Some of the insights that Darrell has gained over the years are presented below.

Darrell mentioned that this group of students was at a slightly lower level than the average Core E, recognizing that every class is different. He said that in this class it is necessary to take more time teaching concepts so that they will understand, which means that not everything will be covered. Through experience, Darrell has learned to informally assess samples he obtains at the start of a class, and from these he decides how to proceed and what to emphasize. He added that in any class there are diverse abilities -- high, middle, and low levels -- amongst the students, some who enjoy verbal exercises and others who like grammar. He stated that heterogeneity in a classroom is just the "nature of the business." Therefore, it is necessary to prepare lessons with varied student abilities and interests in mind.

Because it is a general adult ESL classroom, students vary not only in terms of ability, but also in age. The ages in Darrell's class ranged from nineteen to sixty-three, but he felt this did not make much difference in the class. Rather, he felt that it was noteworthy that regardless of their age, almost all students felt that grammar was an important part of learning a language. This related to the fact that "they can listen to news articles, but they still have to produce a correct sentence at the end of the day." Darrell also emphasized the need to recognize the learners as adults, who seem to be more inclined to want to know the rules.

> Being adults, they are not like kids in the way they acquire the language. They have to learn, they need to, they want to know rules. They want to know the exceptions, how and why and what it means. It is not just, I guess I am not a big fan of the whole language approach, at least with adults, because they want to know how things work. They are analytical in that way.

In spite of being adults, with a great deal of life experience, when they are in the classroom they transform into students, according to their expectations of how a student should behave. Often the role of student implied sitting and listening to the teacher. In this regard, Darrell felt that the times when he was not actively teaching was when the students were practicing their English in a more realistic setting.

> The moments between the actual formal lesson are quite important. Sometimes I go out of the class to get a coffee, I walk back in and there are three or four conversations going on in the classroom, talking to each other, talking to each other about their experiences at Canada Place or trying to get driver's license or the food they eat, or shopping. I sort of hate to break them. . . in some ways I hate to come back into the classroom, because when I come back into the classroom they sort of get the idea: Okay, break is over. Time to get back to work; we're not human beings anymore, we're students.

Therefore, it is also important to recognize what the students feel the role of a student to be, as their behaviour will be strongly influenced by their previous experience.

Most of the ESL learners, Darrell said, come from quite structured educational contexts. Most are used to traditional forms of education, where the students "stick up [their] hands and that kind of thing, so they are used to that." Many students are accustomed to deferring to the authority of the instructor and assimilating the information presented. For this reason, Darrell felt it is important to recognize the learning strategies that students have developed based on their previous experience. These strategies

> work for them in situations, certain situations. So I mean sometimes the methods that we think are good may not apply to people from other cultures.

Darrell felt that an important component of effective teaching is flexiblility.

Darrell related that while teaching in Nigeria, he needed to re-evaluate his ideas on instructional methods. During his studies in Canada, he had taken "courses on methodology and then I went over to Nigeria, and tried to use them and they were pretty much a failure." Darrell emphasized the need to value alternative ways of teaching and learning which the students bring with them.

> They have a different, sort of real, way of learning, and they learn better in certain ways. Some of our methods work well, but they have methods too, they have ways of learning, so I have to sort of try and respect that and try and blend the two I guess. And not say "you have to learn this way because this is the way the research tells us that you are supposed to learn." I mean people just have different strategies. It is a kind of meeting, trying to meet somewhere in the middle.

Being able to integrate positive elements of various instructional strategies, which provide legitimacy to the students' experience and history, seems a vital component of a "healthy" learning environment.

In regard to students' previous educational experience, Darrell stated that he felt it made "quite a bit of difference." When I asked how he felt it influenced the class, he replied that the difference lie in learning strategies.

> I mean the main thing is in the learning strategies that people who have higher levels of education have acquired for learning a language. They pick up things a lot quicker and retain them a lot longer. And it is just because they have been in school and have developed strategies for learning. Whereas people who haven't been to school, this is a new experience for them, they just don't know how to learn.

As Darrell points out, familiarity with formal education and learning strategies can provide an advantage to those students who have higher levels of education, and a disadvantage to those who do not. Even though Darrell was aware of this difference, when I asked him about strategies he may use to assist the students with lower levels of education, Darrell hesitated.

> Hmmm. Probably not, now that I think about it. I don't think so. I can't think that, I would say this person has a low level of education, and therefore I have to implement my low level of education approach. [...] I don't have one, so . . .[...] Maybe it is an intangible.

Nevertheless, he did stress the importance of "treating everyone with a great deal of respect." Although they may not have a lot of education, it is important to recognize that they have "gone places and done things, and they have experiences, and so you just respect them as human beings is the main thing, and I guess they will respond to that." Therefore, although he recognized the difference, he did not have any specific strategies to address this difference.

It is also interesting that Darrell felt that students with fewer years of educational experience had less confidence. Furthermore, their confidence level did not always relate to their actual English ability. One student in Darrell's class, Aurora, was an excellent example of this. Although she had very good spoken English, Aurora lacked confidence in her own abilities, which is almost certainly due to her lack of formal schooling. Darrell relates her story in the following quote:

> I have one student who is in my class, Aurora, who hasn't been to school very much. And her English is *pretty decent* , her spoken English is quite good I think. She is always,. . .she has already confided in me that she only has a grade two education. And I can sort of see her looking, that when I am putting some grammar on the board, kind of look over at her and she is kind of mystified if I am writing it on the board, even though she can use it. She is frightened of that academic side of speaking. But when you take it away, she speaks and she is probably one of the clearest and best speakers in that class. One of the most natural speakers in the class. But she has a fairly low level of education, and that is bound to affect somebody who is in a classroom, especially when they are sitting beside other people who are engineers or whatever.

Therefore, Aurora's own feelings about grammar, due to her lack of familiarity with it, are compounded within the ESL classroom. The ESL classroom is one of the few locations where someone with post-secondary education, such as an engineer, can sit beside someone who has less than elementary education. Knowing how to learn, and having previous exposure to grammatical principles is advantageous for the student with more education. It can also be intimidating for the student with less education to sit beside the university graduate. However, instructors may not be as consciously aware of the effects of educational experience because they are not as visibly obvious. For this reason, instructors may be more aware of other, more visible factors.

One such factor which Darrell felt had an obvious effect on the participation of students is culture. When asked about which factors he felt influenced the activity levels in the classroom, he said that culture was an important element.

> I guess part of it is cultural. I mean some students are reluctant to participate, and I think it has a lot to do with their cultural background. I mean if you get a shy, little Vietnamese woman they

> are just going to be more reluctant to speak than an outgoing, gregarious Yugoslavian for example. [...] So that is part. The cultural factor is quite important.

In addition to different levels of interaction, Darrell also felt that cultural backgrounds played a role in determining their learning preferences, although other factors may combine with this to confound the issue. For instance, a students' desire to speak in class, or to deal with controversial issues, could be related to culture, but could also be affected by gender. Although one can never be certain why certain preferences arise, there may be patterns of preferences among students. If trend exist, the instructor may reflect upon possible causes.

> Well, you see differences, I mean some students prefer reading to speaking, and they may say, for instance, " I need more speaking." Let's take one student for example,[...] She is very shy, very quiet. She says she needs more grammar. But she doesn't, because she knows her grammar pretty well. What she needs is more speaking. So she, but she says she needs more grammar because she wants to avoid speaking. But I am not sure if that is culturally bound, I don't know if Vietnamese women are expected to be quiet and in the background. And I guess culturally, I have tried to do news articles in the classroom, and some of those, some of those articles seem to go over better with people from certain ethnic or cultural backgrounds than others. And I found that for example if I bring in an article, the people with European background are a lot more interested in that kind of thing, or even a Spanish background, Latin American background are more interested in that, than say, a Vietnamese. And I am not sure why that is. Maybe they are not as interested in the news as other people. And I have asked other teachers, and one said, "I know why. It is that if they, because it doesn't affect them personally it is not of interest." That could be true, I don't know. But those news articles are never successful with Vietnamese women, maybe because they are not interested in world events. That would have a sort of cultural dimension to it.

In relation to culture, Darrell admitted that ESL instructors do tend to make many generalizations.

> I mean a teacher might come out of a class and say I have six students from this particular country. And we just nod and say, "say no more." So I mean we as teachers make all kinds of generalizations about students.

Nevertheless, after years of working with various ethnic groups, "those generalizations have proven themselves to be fairly accurate. I mean, certain people from certain cultural backgrounds have certain problems in English." This knowledge can sometimes assist an instructor because it assists in an initial assessment, to know where the instruction may need to initially focus.

> If I walk into the class and I see fifteen Vietnamese women, I will probably decide to spend more time on speaking in that classroom. So it does sort of, the generalizations do help to dictate what goes on in the classroom. At least where I am going to start. Then I'll see what happens, I mean, as we progress, I might find out that O.K. half of them are pretty good speakers, and half not so good, so I'll look for other things.

And although it is extremely detrimental to stereotype, making generalizations can assist in some instances with ESL instruction. With generalizations, exceptions are expected and accepted. It is important, especially with large class sizes and no time for in-depth individual assessments, to have a basic idea where to start, and then to be flexible: "Flexibility is very important."

When asked about the sex of the students, and how that may influence the class, Darrell said that he felt differences between men and women, especially in a very heterogeneous class, are hard to see. If he were to make any generalization, it would be that women tend to be more analytical and men more adventuresome. Darrell felt that women often understand the lesson more, and seem to understand grammar better than men. However, men "are willing to try words that they are not sure whether it is the right word or not. They are a lot more willing to throw it out and see what kind of reaction they get." However, Darrell felt that the differences between women and men do not only relate to sex. As discussed above in relation to interests in the classroom, culture could also play a role in the behaviour.

> Women come from cultures where those women, where men do more of the talking and women are in the background. And I think that reflects itself in the class.

It is interesting that in Darrell's class, two of the students were pregnant, but Darrell did not mention this. Both of the women stated that their pregnancy

affected them, because of morning sickness and fatigue. At times they said they needed to leave the classroom because of the smell or heat. Perhaps because the instructor is focused on language acquisition, pregnancy may be seen as irrelevant to learning, although it did affect the learning opportunity for these students. It not only required them to leave the room, but also seemed to have affected their ability to concentrate on the lesson.

Overall, however, Darrell felt that readiness to learn is very important in student participation and learning. Students who know why they are learning English, who have a goal, have a great advantage. Students who see English as a means to obtaining a goal are more likely to focus on the lesson, to ask questions, and to take from the class what they need. Others do not have a point of reference outside of the classroom and therefore accept all of the information, but without a clear focus.

> Those students have a clear idea of why they are here, and what their goals are; they have objectives that they want to achieve, that are fairly clear. Like "I want to go to upgrading, I want to go to NAIT. I want to do "this" this is my goal in the next year. And this is part of how I am going to get this goal. Those are the people who benefit the most, and those are the most participatory, because they have a sense of where they are going. Other students are here and have no idea of why they are here. They are just here, because there is nowhere else to go basically, or because someone told them they have to come here. Maybe their manpower counselor told them "you need English, go here." So that is an important part. And those people who do not have a clear idea of why they are here cannot really relate to the work. It doesn't have any meaning, and they cannot control. . . I mean, they don't have an agenda so they just accept whatever agenda is presented to them, whether it is of any benefit or not. Whereas other people who want to go places and want to do things will tell you what they need, and you can just cut through the fluff and get right to exactly what they want to do. Those people participate more, they are more eager, so there is that one.

An example of this is the student Hee Soon. She was fairly active, she has a goal, and "she wants to learn English because she wants to do something." And in the follow-up interview, when I asked Darrell who had achieved the highest

level, Darrell said that it was probably Hee Soon. She works hard, is focused and very disciplined, he said.

> I think she comes from a background where she is educated, she has been to school, she knows how to learn, and she is just very disciplined approach to learning English. She does all of her homework, works hard at it and has made progress.

Therefore, in Hee Soon, we may see a combination of factors which combine to work toward her success in the classroom. Previous education, having a goal, and having life experience (she ran a business in Korea), combine to help her attain a higher English proficiency.

Darrell also felt that Ivan had made the most progress in the class. This was attributed to his having reached a certain threshold. Ivan, in the interview with me, admitted that he was frustrated by his inability to express his thoughts in English. He felt that in Spanish, his first language, he could express complex ideas, but he found this impossible in English. Darrell, similarly said that Ivan appeared to be silenced by his inability to express himself clearly, but that recently he had begun to speak more. He had obtained enough knowledge to utilize strategic competence to express his ideas if the exact phrase escaped him. This has required the instructor to provide him with the time to formulate his ideas in English.

> He has kind of reached a threshold for him. I talked to his teacher ten weeks ago, and I guess he didn't really say much in the class until about week seven or eight. Then he just started saying something. Before that he couldn't really say very much, according to his other teacher. He knew what he wanted to say, but he just didn't have the English for it. There would be these long silent pauses in the classroom while he was thinking and he just couldn't. And now he is sort of trying, he still has that pause with him, but during that pause it isn't a blank. He sort of tries and then if he can't think of it, then he starts thinking of ways around it. Like how he can explain it another way. I think that is important. And the pauses aren't so long.

Ivan also had an advantage in that his wife was born in Canada and spoke English and Spanish. He could therefore practice his English, and would have more occasions in which to practice socially outside of school than some other students.

These are the main ideas which arose from the interview with Darrell. Following will be the information obtained from the other instructors, starting with Carol.

## Carol

The first instructor interviewed was Carol, who at the time of the interview was teaching an intermediate level class. Carol had beenteaching at this institution for seven years, during which time she had instructed almost every level from simple basic (which includes some literacy) to intermediate three (advanced level, no longer offered). Prior to teaching ESL, she undertook a Bachelor of Arts in English and Psychology, and later returned to University to take a Bachelor of Education after degree in secondary education, taking some adult education courses. Carol started by volunteering at this school, and later, when she began teaching, she was buddied with an experienced teacher from whom she learned a lot.

Carol said that the students in her current class are very motivated and hard working. She said that it is "the kind of group a teacher wants, but you don't always get." This group was very lively and would often initiate conversations and begin talking about things they were interested in. Nevertheless, as Darrell had also said, there are diverse abilities in the class.

> There will be the really outgoing ones, and then there are the ones that are sort of the middle ones, and then the really quiet, insecure, shy people. There is kind of the whole spectrum in the classroom. Usually. Sometimes we try to get a classroom with all of the quiet students together and all of the outgoing ones together.

The varied levels bring many challenges to the teacher to balance the interaction, while having a more homogeneous class has benefits, but brings challenges of its own.

In classes which have more outgoing or more quiet students together, the instructor faces different challenges than in a more varied classroom. In a quiet classroom Carol felt that the atmosphere could be "inactive." You know there isn't much coming from the students. So there is a lot of energy used on the part of the teacher." If a class has a large proportion of outgoing students, it could be hard to keep them focussed.

> Sometimes it is hard to keep them on task, because something will come up and the next thing you know you are off on a tangent and they are not doing whatever it is you had planned to do. Sometimes it is O.K. because you can capitalize on the moment, but sometimes if it happens too often some students are bothered by always going off on a tangent instead of doing what the lesson is supposed to be.

Each class has a personality of its own, which has advantages and disadvantages, requiring the instructor to be receptive of the individual nature of each classroom.

The class which Carol was currently teaching was a heterogeneous class, consisting of students with a wide range of ages, from seventeen to sixty two. Carol said that she finds the varying ages make the class more interesting, "because it is nice to have someone who is older with more experience and sort of ask them for their input, and it is nice to have young people with their young energy." One difficulty which sometimes arises is that the very young students may not feel that they have anything to share. Even if the teacher attempts to bring topics to class which would be appropriate for everyone, sometimes the younger students still feel unable to participate.

> When you have really young people, say 17 or 18, they'll say when you're introducing a speaking fluency topic, they'll say that "I don't know anything about that, I never thought about that." And it is something that if I brought it into the class, I assumed that everyone would have something to say about it.

This appears to be an issue recognized by both instructors and students, which can cause younger students to speak less.

As for the older students, Carol said that she tries to use them as the wise ones. During discussions about various topics, such as values, she will ask the elder students to discuss their experience. "And they have 60 years of

experience, so even if we agree or disagree it doesn't matter, as long as we ask them, because they have been living longer." Therefore personal life experience can cause a difference in the knowledge students feel they have of a subject. This works as a means to promote confidence in the elderly, although it could reinforce the perception of the younger students that they have nothing to share. Thus it is important to manage such a situation carefully, in order to demonstrate respect for all students experiences, even if some students have much less life experience than others.

The age of the students was also taken into consideration when introducing activities in the class. Carol felt that she tried to "bring things into the class that the older people won't find offensive, especially things that have to do with personal relationships." Furthermore, some of the older students are slower learners, but have experience to share which the instructor can use to boost their confidence. Carol said that if they are slower, to "take that into consideration and encourage them and tell them that that is normal and all they can do is keep on trying." Nevertheless, in Carol's class there were several older students who perhaps due to their advanced levels of previous education were very outgoing and fast learners.

The physical effects of aging could also affect some students ability to participate and learn. At the end of the interview Carol pointed out that Fun has problems with her vision. Although she primarily relies on hearing, her English is very correct, and until the mid-session interviews Carol did not know that Fun had difficulty seeing. Fun had never said that she could not see the blackboard. Carol then asked

> "Why didn't you say something to me?" And she said it was "okay because I take it in through my ears." And I noticed she doesn't even look up. She just looks down onto the paper. [...] I thought she was just concentrating, but she was focused on listening.

Never looking up, Carol pointed out, could also be perceived as a student not paying attention, even though the student really is. The student may also not tell the instructor about their disability due to embarrassment or not wanting to bother the instructor. Because Fun was a strong student, Carol did not notice her physical disadvantage, and therefore did not utilize any strategies to facilitate her learning.

In relation to elderly students, Carol has found that respect plays an important role in the classroom. As mentioned earlier, respect for older students' experience helps raise their confidence, but if the student feels he or she does not receive the deserved respect it can cause tension in the classroom. Carol mentioned that, on occasion, older students have wanted respect from other students, and tension developed if they did not receive it. Therefore, Carol felt it is important to model respect for elderly students, as it was a behaviour she wanted from her students. The following comment demonstrates how she felt respect for all students is important, but especially for older students.

> I mean respect for all students, but I show the older students, I mean they are older than I am, and I show them the respect that a younger person would show them. You know. And so I think the other students tend to do the same.

The value of the elderly and respect shown varies across cultures and social status, which could also increase tension if varied expectations exist in a classroom.

Youth also posed some interesting challenges, in that very young students, males in their early twenties or younger, in particular, may appear to be much younger than their older classmates. Carol felt it important to stress that although some may appear at times to be immature, they are not; they are acting their age.

> You see I read a book that said that adolescence doesn't even end until you are twenty-six. So I mean they are acting like adolescents, they are acting their age, they are just acting their age. So in the class I think it is important to know that they are not immature. You cannot expect them to be as responsible, you know, because they are still in that discovery period. Like I said here, I used to try to tame them. I used to think it was my job to make them into responsible students and now I just feel that when I was in high school I was the same as they are. You can't make them into adults when they are still in adolescence. I mean they are in that transition period. Let young people be young.

Nevertheless, this youthfulness seemed to apply more to the male than female students, whom Carol felt were more studious and responsible. She also added that some young men were more responsible and "act like girls." She felt that one

should "go with it and use it instead of trying to fight it, or try to discipline them into being more adult."

In addition to age, cultural differences can also influence the classroom. Carol felt that students are very interested in learning about one another's culture. This, she said, enhanced student interest and motivation to speak with one another. Each week on Fridays students have presentations where they are to teach

> something from their culture. And they just love it, they absolutely love it ... because they mainly come from cultures that are one language, one culture countries, so this is their first experience with, of experiencing people of different culture.

Outside of the presentations, discussions about one another's culture arises spontaneously. Carol mentioned one instance (I happened to be observing that day) when Feng mentioned that she had three mothers. Many students were surprised and curious, and began to ask many questions; they were all interested in understanding and sharing their own experience. Discussions relating to difference were not always without incident. Carol pointed out that during some of these discussions relating to difference, such as "the Muslim religion compared to some other religion, [...] an argument can start up." Sometimes the class can become quite heated, and Carol feels that it is important for the instructor to intervene and say, "we are not here to judge anyone or change anyone or say one person is right or one person is wrong. And I just say that each culture is right for its people and we're just talking about it and learning about different cultures. "

Another difficulty which can arise is due to the pronunciation difficulties of persons with certain linguistic backgrounds. As pointed out in the student interviews and other teacher interviews, some students do not want to work with those who have pronunciation problems.

> For instance students from Vietnam and China have more problems with pronunciation, so you will get students from more Western countries who don't want to work with them, because they say they can't understand them. And so sometimes that can cause some tension in the classroom.

Carol said that on instances such as these, an instructor can play an important role in easing this tension. She said that she doesn't "let them get away with 'I

don't understand him. I don't want to work with him." Instead she models conversational strategies, such as asking for clarification or repetition of what was said.

Carol also stressed the importance of avoiding stereotypes when teaching. She said that in a classroom

> you don't only have differences in culture, but you have differences in personality types, differences in sex roles and so , I think you have to take into consideration all of that.

Carol felt that although generalizations are made, it is important to recognize the exceptions which may arise, due to the influence of other factors.

> So you could have an introverted shy Polish woman or man, you know, who just does not want to speak. But probably most people will tell you that Polish students are outgoing. And same with Vietnamese. You'll hear that Vietnamese students, the stereotype is that they are very quiet, and that they will only speak when you ask them to speak. But I have Yen who asks questions often and who is very outgoing.

The influence of one's family of origin, Carol also said, played an influential role. She stated that students' experiences in childhood determine behaviours in adulthood, and must also be taken into account.

In fact, in the classroom occasions arise when a students' negative past experiences are triggered in the classroom. Sometimes a student will disclose a negative experience in the course of a conversation. Carol said that sometimes the person may feel uncomfortable about having said this.

> That person might feel that "Oh my God, what have I said?" and the other students are kind of taken back because they don't know how to handle this kind of exposure. And so I try to remain really calm as though nothing has happened. If it is some kind of emotional thing you have to give the student some time to regain their composure. And then also let the other students regain theirs.

Although the topic is gently brought back to the one being discussed, Carol said it is important to let the student know that their disclosure was not ignored, and offer to help them get in touch with counseling or other assistance, if they are interested. She emphasized the importance of recognizing that teachers are not

trained as counselors, but can work as an intermediaries, referring students to necessary services.

In regard to past experiences, it is important to be proactive in recognizing that students may have had negative experiences. For example, Carol said that she rarely asks students to write or talk about happy childhood experiences "because some people can rack their brains and can not think of one." Because we do not know students backgrounds, we should keep in mind that any student may have had a negative experience, of which we are not aware.

> And I think it is really important that they may have had family problems but also if they come from Yugoslavia, I had a young girl in my last class and she grew up in war torn Yugoslavia, a happy childhood experience?!! There aren't any. It is war and hunger and poverty. So I am really careful to get them to talk about a funny thing or embarrassing thing. I try to make them personal, but not so personal.

Even with this in mind, one can not foresee all situations, and therefore it is also important to be prepared in case conflict or an awkward situation should arise.

Carol also pointed out that returning to school could be a humbling experience for the students. Many students have been working and feel that they are capable in what they are familiar with, be it farming or engineering. Then these students go to school to learn English, about which their knowledge is limited.

> Going to school is a humbling experience in many ways because you realize how much you don't know. You realize how much smarter some people are than you, it doesn't matter whether you are learning a language or in a history class or a philosophy class. So in a lot of ways you see where you are in relation to other people. I think that happens.

This answer was in relation to education level and confidence, and may mean that students with lower levels of education feel less confident than those with higher levels whom they may feel are smarter.

Previous education may have resulted in students being accustomed to different teaching styles and thus learning styles. Although students may be used to a different teaching style, Carol said she felt that the students like the

instructional style in Canada. In Canada "it is different, because the students are participating and they are active and they have to speak." Nevertheless, it is important to integrate varied activities in the classroom. This is done not only for the sake of variety, "but also because of different learning styles, and I also try to be sensitive to different learning styles." Flexibility was important, therefore, in order to address the differences among students.

Furthermore, as the other teachers had also found, Carol said that students with higher levels of previous education have more analytical and study skills. Experience in the educational system has also given them the opportunity to find out what works for them. Carol said they "know how to listen and if they want to take notes, whereas other students who have had less schooling, you have to teach them study skills." There are learning skills which students who have had many years of schooling have, and which we may take for granted. Some of these abilities include how to learn new vocabulary, reading and understanding new words from context, and how to use a book or a dictionary as a resource. Students with less educational experience may tend to guess or say that they don't know. Carol said that the instructor can take a student through the process of being analytical or in performing apparently simple tasks such as using a dictionary.

And in relation to the gender of students in the classroom, Carol said that she felt there were some differences between men and women in the classroom. Although there are exceptions, Carol felt that men "tend to be more outgoing and aggressive, and even more problematic than women." Nevertheless, Carol said that although she tries to address this, "pretty much that is ingrained in our personality. You know, women in a lot of cultures are submissive and so you can't really expect them to come out of that in a classroom situation." Therefore, although we can not expect students to change, we may need to take steps to equalize participation and bring out quieter students.

It is noteworthy that even though we are aware of differences between students we may reinforce some behaviours. One very common behaviour which is reinforced is the allegedly instinctive nurturing nature of women. Although we should recognize and show appreciation of student achievements, some comments we make relate to gender stereotypes. For example, Carol said:

> I just interviewed all of my students and I didn't take a lunch break and so one student came in and she brought me some crackers. And so I just take every opportunity to say "you're so thoughtful, I really appreciate having you in my class." And you know like whenever they do something good I let them know that it is really appreciated and valuable in the class.

The student who brought the crackers was an older female student, who Carol said is intelligent, analytical, bright, and motivated. To say she is appreciated for her thoughtfulness is important, but not at the expense of her other qualities.

> We all see older women as being nurturing, but that doesn't stand out as anything significant. It is nice if a woman takes someone under her wing and helps them along, it is a nice thing that happens.

As can be seen, some of the issues which Carol addressed are similar to those presented by Darrell, although in some instances, such as the importance of age, a difference can be seen. Following will be the information received in the interviews with Alicia.

## Alicia

Alicia was teaching an intermediate level course at the time of the research. She had been teaching at that school for fourteen years, starting in the fall of 1980. Before starting instruction she took a graduate program from Carleton University, where she was exposed to teaching methodologies, grammar, and techniques. During her years teaching, she attended the ESL conferences and reads articles and books to keep up to date with information on teaching. When she began teaching, Alicia taught predominantly the lower levels, which she enjoyed. She felt it "must have fulfilled some need within me to work with students who really needed me." At that time, when she taught an intermediate class, she thought,

> they can already speak and they have varying problems. If I introduce the present perfect, half of the class knew present perfect, the other half didn't. So I found the fact that there were varying needs in the classroom, it wasn't quite as gratifying.

Nevertheless, over the last few years Alicia found that she preferred intermediate levels, perhaps due to a change within herself.

Alicia said that she had always been very shy, and this she feels helps her sympathize with the students. Her upbringing also influenced her approach to instruction.

> And part of it too is my religious upbringing. I really believe that there's self-worth within and we just need to help the person recognize it. Help them recognize their gifts. That is a personal goal of mine. It is not a school goal. It is something that is really important to me. It is called actualizing one's strengths.

As can be seen in much of the data from her interview, her goal was verified by the data she shared. Each of the instructors had slightly different approaches in the classroom, and Alicia's would be classified as a more therapeutic style.

Like Carol, Alicia felt that diverse student ages could result in younger students feeling they have nothing to contribute. This could cause "that young person [to become] flippant to cope with it, but others become withdrawn. They feel they have nothing" to share. When this happens, Alicia said it is important for the teacher to find something about that person which can be shared with the group and show that they have worthwhile experience. She uses questionnaires and other activities which enable her to gain insight into the students' lives. Then this information can be used to assist in the sharing.

Alicia also felt that elderly students could influence the class dynamics and atmosphere, if they were very serious. On several occasions, some older students made other students feel inhibited, such as if they wanted to be addressed using a title, such as "Mister." Even if an older student tried to relax, a lighthearted atmosphere could be difficult to achieve, as had happened in a previous class Alicia taught.

> The intermediate level last year, I had a doctor in my class, who was ... He acted, he tried to act light and youthful, but he would scold the students if they became, not fresh but a little lighter.[...] He would scold. So it had an impact.

So although he tried to relax, his disciplinary tendencies dampened the lighthearted atmosphere. Another student in Alicia's class, who had taught

Russian literature in Russia for 35 years, had very strict ideas about how students should behave.

> With her it was her body that showed she didn't approve. It was body language like a frown. Sternness. She ostracized some students who did not behave.

The authoritarian inclination of some older students seemed to fit in with a parental nature, and may be enhanced by having a high professional status, such as the Russian literature professor and the doctor.

This tendency for some older students to be more serious or to reprimand "misbehaving" students could affect an entire session. It not only affects the other students, but also the teacher, Alicia admits.

> Because I recognize that at times I have been drawn to those people to get a quick check from them as to how they are reacting. I don't want to, but it is almost stronger than me. Like if I know that two people are going to frown upon this activity or this approach, I quickly look for a reaction. There is a voice inside of me that says "Don't," but sometimes it is stronger than me, and sometimes I modify my activities because of it.

Therefore, stronger students appear to be able to tailor the lesson to fit their interests by creating an uncomfortable atmosphere. Students who are less vocal or more submissive would not influence the lesson as much, as they would not cause discomfort in the classroom.

Alicia felt that ethnicity was one of the main reasons, second only to individual personality, behind the different levels of participation in the classroom. Although you may have students who do not fit stereotypes, she felt that persons belonging to different ethnic groups do have certain tendencies.

> If they are predominantly Asian, they'll... it is often the mentality "teacher teach me." They are ready to be receptive learners. Although occasionally you'll get an outgoing Oriental student. But if it is a classroom with predominantly Oriental students they are generally speaking more quiet, the passive learner.

Instructors do tend to generalize, she adds, saying that it is because they have been exposed to many different groups, and "certain traits generally will surface, and it has been quite consistent."

Nevertheless, exceptions to the generalizations do occur. In Alicia's class, the quietest student was Stephania, a young woman from the Ukraine. Alicia expressed her surprise, saying how she had expected the quietest student to be one of the Asian students, and not one of European background.

> It is strange, because she is of European background, one wouldn't expect it. She could sit there passively. [...] The men find her attractive; if the men are paired with her, they are very happy. She'll smile with her beautiful brown eyes, but I doubt that she has a friend in that class. Ilona sits beside her and Ilona is very understanding, but we also have to take it into consideration that they are the only two who go off for first aid. They are not there during homework time and half of lunch hour. But Ilona is more outgoing, positive and really shares freely. And so I don't know. Stephania is like pulling teeth to get much out of her. Most surprising. I would have expected somebody like Hoa or Lee to be the quietest ones. But no, it is Stephania. It is interesting.

Alicia had not been able to hold the mid session interview with Stephania before our interviews, so did not have more insight into her quiet behaviour. Alicia felt it may be because she was moved from one class to another without explanation, or because of the first aid course.

Alicia felt that the main factor for differing participation levels is personality. Personality traits carry over from one's life outside of school into the classroom.

> I think it is a carry over of their personality. If they are outgoing, then they carry that over to the classroom. If people have been shy generally in their lives, they carry it into a language situation. It is just intensified because it is intimidating, you know, to make mistakes and to take a risk.

Alicia then feels it is important to actualize their strengths in order to get them to become more talkative and outgoing.

As in the other classes, Alicia found that some students expressed a dislike for working with certain classmates. On occasion students would make requests to Alicia, such as "I don't want to work with this person, I don't want to work with that" or "I don't want to work with Orientals. I don't understand them." Alicia said that this was not acceptable to her, and she would try to explain the

importance of working with everyone. She would use a workplace analogy to demonstrate the need to work with people of varied abilities and accents.

> I'll say to them, "how will you know who your supervisor's going to be? Or your colleagues are going to be. For example, you may be in a hospital. There are a lot of Filipinos in a hospital. They're not Canadians, and yet they have some very responsible jobs. But if I don't understand, or if I haven't developed an ear to recognize other accents it is to my disadvantage." And I said that in the classroom, I expect the people will be tolerant. It is just part and parcel of my expectations in the classroom.

Another factor which influenced students' behaviour was their stage of adjustment in moving to Canada. The difference between cultures, and the amount of time students have had to adjust will determine, in part, the level of acculturation attained. Students in varied stages of acculturation will behave differently, and Alicia felt that students in the second stage of acculturation tend to be pessimistic and negative. This, she feels, is normal, but it can have a negative impact on the classroom. In the current classroom, Alicia needed to address this, and she said the following:

> You have a choice to stay in that stage and surround yourself with people who have the same views, or trying to get a little more supportive group of people to pull you out of it, but I don't want to hear about it in the classroom.

Following this discussion in class, the student for whom this was directed came up to Alicia and said that he would try to be more positive.

Related to both ethnic and educational background is the fact that students are often accustomed to a more traditional form of education. Alicia says that it is important to promote the importance of student participation in the classroom.

> Well, I will specifically come out and say to students that in the past it was quite proper for students to sit and listen carefully to the teacher, but that in a language learning class people are going to progress very slowly if they let the teacher do the speaking.

Alicia said that it is important to encourage students to take risks and speak out, even if it is not in their nature. It is "very comfortable to sit back and let someone else to do the talking," but it is disadvantageous for their own language learning. To encourage participation is important, and Alicia said that an instructor should use praise and recognition of efforts which are "wanted and valued."

As in the other classes, Alicia found that students with higher levels of education have more learning strategies.

> Tremendous difference I find in learning ability. The more education a person has, it enables them to develop a quick understanding of structures, particularly. Whereas the ones with little formal education develop, ah, good memories, but other than memories they can't transfer skills because they do not have the analytical skills.

Alicia said that although there are differences, she does not find the differences as noticeable in higher level classes. This may be due to the overall higher levels of previous education which the students in the intermediate ESL classes usually have. Alicia said that in the current class the upper third have university, and the lower third have high school. This population is not as varied as that in the lower level courses, where some students may not have completed elementary school and others have a university degree.

One difference which Alicia found to be due to education was in relation to correctness versus fluency. Students with more education may be "more cautious, perform better on a test in terms of correctness, but won't develop fluency as quickly." Students with more previous education may speak haltingly because they are processing rules of grammar and syntax as they speak.

> So they are developing a correctness and an understanding which is not always important to those without the analytical skills. So those without the analytical skills can move ahead much more rapidly and gain fluency and take risks because these questions are not even going through their minds.

Alicia provided examples of what the two forms of speech may be:

1. (analytical) If I ... had done ... my homework, I ... would be happy with myself.

2. (not analytical) I no do my homework, so I no happy.

When asked about the effects of gender in the classroom, Alicia seemed to be responding not only to my question, but also to the public discussions of gender inequalities in education. Perhaps this is because of the great deal of information disseminated in literature and in the media. Answering the question, Alicia said the following:

> I don't see that, because I'll have some...like in this class I've got some strong women and some strong men. Like Luba, and Luba is strong. She is assertive, and Ivana is strong. Ah, if anything, I have found that often women, in terms of grammatical mastery, that women are better. That's about the only area. They will master grammar faster, you know they have more. The analytical side is stronger. I used to think that men were better at taking risks, but I don't think so any more. Because in the last, since I have been at intermediate levels, I have been surprised that I have had really strong women. *Very strong women.* Oh in the spring, I had a woman from Romania and one from Lebanon. They were so, almost aggressive that the men had to get out of the way.

Alicia answered that she did not see differences between men and women. She followed this comment by stating that she has strong women, some of whom are grammatically very strong. Perhaps she is responding to assumptions she has about what I meant by "differences" between male and female students. She answers the question by saying she did not find *that*, because "I've got some strong women." The apparent contradiction causes one to wonder what Alicia means by *that*. It may be in relation to the popular discussions of submissive females and dominant males, for Alicia continues by saying that women may obtain grammatical mastery faster. Alicia further states that she has exclusively taught higher levels for the past five years, and in the lower levels she had noticed a greater difference between men and women. When she was teaching lower levels, she felt that men were more outgoing, but that there is no class where "men generally are stronger."

It is also interesting that Alicia stressed the strength of women, saying that this has surprised her. Perhaps we do not expect women to be strong, and when they are it seems to be noticed more. Alicia did not mention that women have to get out of the way for strong men, which probably also happens. Furthermore, the women deemed strong by Alicia come from European countries, and therefore this may be a socialized pattern for women from this area. In Alicia's

current class, Azim was the most outgoing student and would ask questions of his own personal interest, and he "wants an immediate answer."

> Azim asks so many questions at times, I almost feel that I would like to say, "Azim can we address this question later?" Because sometimes it may just be a very subtle difference in wording, and he wants an immediate answer. But I try to handle it very quickly, but there are times when I think I should almost say to him, "look we'll do it during homework time." But Ali is very outgoing too, but I know that Ali's questions are more helpful for the group. Whereas Azim's often are meeting his personal needs.

However, when she speaks of Ivana, whom Alicia feels is very strong, Alicia said that Ivana is outgoing, but does not ask many questions.

> Ivana. Ivana is very outgoing, but doesn't ask so many questions. She needs to get a lot of feedback. She doesn't think she's very good, but she is *really* talkative. But she is not very happy with her progress -- she thinks she should be so much better. She is very outgoing.

Alicia said she likes to use humour in the class to relax the students. One example of these stories can be found below, but because of the sexual humour she sometimes feels reluctant to use these stories.

> This lady Mrs. Robinson, had suffered from quite a few painful headaches. She went to many doctors and she never found any medicine that could help her. So her husband decided to take her to a very good doctor. The doctor examined her carefully, and asked her many questions. After that he suddenly put his arms around her and gave her a big kiss. She looked better immediately. "Ah," the doctor said to the husband, "this is what she needs. I suggest that she get a hug Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays." And the husband said O.K., I'll bring her on Tuesdays and Thursdays, but on Saturdays I go sailing."

Alicia said she usually uses this story to relieve students' nerves on the first day of a course, but she does not feel this story is appropriate for persons who are priests or monks. Within this story are several gender stereotypes, presented in the guise of humour, which perpetuate some of the perceptions of men and women.

In relation to dominating classroom participation, Alicia stated that in large group activities stronger students tend to dominate. Some stronger students want to dominate the class, to be the center of attention and "try all kinds of strategies." As a result, at the end of a lesson some students have not spoken, while others have monopolized the discussion.

> Time just flies by. When one just considers the parts of a lesson, like review introduction practice, one will suddenly recognize that an hour has gone by and somebody has not had much of a chance. So I think that a teacher always has to be aware of that.

Alicia said that it is important to try and keep track of who has spoken and who has not, who has been asked questions and who has been unintentionally left out. The quieter people may enjoy listening to others speak, but Alicia feels it is important to encourage these people to speak. With larger classes this is sometimes difficult, which is why small group work is important.

One possible cause of difficulty in noticing who had spoken and who had not may have been that the outgoing students were seated in one area of the room. As the outgoing students asked questions, answered questions, and interrupted, the teacher's attention was focused on them. This resulted in the instructors attention being focused on one specific area of the room, and the quieter students on the other side were out of the line of sight of the instructor. It is understandable, therefore, that it was difficult for Alicia to notice that some students had not spoken much, as they were out of her vision. It results in a greater challenge for the instructor to balance interaction, if the outgoing students are not situated evenly throughout the class (a variable which would be extremely difficult to control). Although the teachers said that students changed seats, in Alicia's class I did not see the students change seats. It may have been a useful way to equalize interaction.

Nevertheless, Azim felt that Alicia did balance the interaction in the class by inviting the students to participate, but not forcing them.

> Azim: I think in my opinion help all people because she, teacher, stress on the people who usually don't speak too much. to persuade him to speak, and that make you have more self confident. Of course, if they find someone very shy she don't have more stress.
>
> Lori: How does she do that?

> Azim She just asks and if you don't want to answer, that's okay, but have to ask.

Other students also mentioned that they felt comfortable speaking when Alicia looked at them. Just looking at the students was a form of welcoming them into the conversation.

Alicia was a teacher very concerned with the psychological well-being of the students. She felt that self-actualization of the students was an important element of the ESL classroom. Much of the information she provided reflected this, and some of the students mentioned that they appreciated her efforts, while others felt uncomfortable by the emphasis on personal disclosures. Another interesting comment made by Alicia, was that she placed great emphasis on her attire. When the weather was hot or dreary, she would wear clothing that produce a more cheery or fresh atmosphere.

Alicia provided many interesting insights into the manner a student's background can influence the classroom. Following are the perceptions obtained from Steven, who taught a lower level class.

## Steven

Steven was teaching a high Core E class, which is a little higher than the course Darrell was teaching but lower than either Carol's or Alicia's. Steven began instructing English during a visit to his brother who was working in a refugee camp in Thailand. Steven had a teaching certificate, although he had no specific ESL training. Upon his return to Canada he began to volunteer at the Mennonite Centre for Newcomers, and then worked as a tutor and ESL coordinator. He had been teaching at the current school for about ten years at the time of the interview. Over the years Steven had taught a wide range of courses, and said that he prefers the level he was currently teaching, because they know enough to understand a basic conversation, but still require a lot of English instruction. Only one interview was held with Steven, as he did not want a follow-up interview. In many instances, clarification of some statements would have proven helpful, but this was not possible. I tried my best to understand the data without clarification.

Similar to what was mentioned by the other instructors, students who were much older or much younger than the others could cause noticeable differences in the classroom. In Steven's class was a student who was only eighteen years old, whom the other students called "Mickey Mouse." Steven said that she was noticeably much younger than the other students.

> She is officially eighteen, but only really fourteen, so she often does not know what the others are talking about. Or can't, or doesn't feel that she has anything to talk about. She is not bad, she participates pretty well. She gets the jokes and speaks quite well, but in the large discussions she doesn't, she can't really, she doesn't have the experience to participate. And, or authority.

She found it difficult to participate, thus limiting her opportunity to practice English which may prove disadvantageous to her language learning.

Students who were much older than their classmates could also cause a difference in the classroom. Steven felt that this is due, in part, to the respect which some older students may expect, especially if they come from cultures where there is "a respected age." Steven stressed that

> when there is an older man in the class, they treat him differently. They may have difficulty calling him by his first name, or whatever, and he may not like that. Or she.

When I asked why he added women, if it was an afterthought or if there was a difference, he thought for a while. Then he said that there may be a difference.

> I am not sure. I am trying to think of examples. If there is only one older woman in the class, then she sometimes takes on the role of matriarch, I've noticed. Where she demands the respect. And I have noticed, and it may be because of the people I have had in the class, but the older men do not seem to demand the respect, but they seem to get it. I am not sure, that's what I have noticed. But that may be because of the people I have had in the class.

Steven also said that in order to relieve some of the possible tension in the class, "when there is an older man in the class and I know that he would appreciate getting the respect from me, I do that too. "

Steven also found that students of certain age groups tended to associate with one another. During the breaks and at lunch, students of like ages and with

similar experiences would talk together. This coincides with some of the comments made by students as well as other instructors. Some of the students from Steven's class also stated that they had developed friendships outside of the school, and would talk with one another on the phone in the evenings after school and meet on the weekends.

Besides age, Steven felt that there were many factors influencing the participation in the classroom, although the most important may be how settled students feel in their life.

> There are a lot of them I guess. Personality is one. The individual, personal personality, or the personality of their culture, or how they are dealing with moving from another country, outside problems in class, whether or not they may have conflicts in the class with me or with someone else. So there are a lot of possible reasons for that. I don't get too uptight if one person is not participating. That doesn't, I make note of it, and I may offhand ask them about this during homework hour or during time when class is not in session, but it is ...I realize that they are going through different things in their lives and at this point they don't want to talk. That's fine.

Recognizing that there are a myriad of possible reasons behind student participation or lack thereof is important. If participation is important for language learning, however, then it may be important to attempt to understand or to encourage quiet students to speak.

Steven said that he often had students who did not fit within the stereotypes which were normally associated with certain cultural groups. Cam is one of the students whom Steven felt contradicted cultural stereotypes. In the current class, although Asian students were commonly expected to be more quiet and less involved in the class, Cam was a definite exception.

> She is very involved, and I think it is her personality, in that she has gone through some of the, I mean she has gone through a divorce, and things like some of the other ladies in the class have, so they can relate to each other. She dresses differently. Western or whatever, flamboyantly. And I think she is on her own here too. So she has the independence from her parents, so she has the freedom to do what she wants.

The other students from Asia, however, did fit more within the stereotype, and did not associate much with Cam. Another student in the class who did not fit

the stereotype was Joseph. Joseph "is a definite exception," Steven said. "The stereotype is that the Polish are loud, and he is not at all. He is very quiet and reserved." Steven said that after his years of teaching and experience, he had become accustomed to students' individuality and stressed the importance of being flexible.

Steven said that it is very important to be open-minded regarding student cultural backgrounds, although it may be advantageous to have an idea about customs. His experience teaching has exposed hime to many facets of cultural differences, customs and exceptions. Furthermore, Steven's wife is Cambodian. This, he felt, gave him a personal experience with cultural differences, which furthers his sensitivity to cultural differences.

> Well in terms of their customs and what they will be comfortable with, then yes. I know that young Vietnamese women are not comfortable when men touch them, so I do not go up and slap them on the back. This yes. So these kind of cultural things, like with Muslim women, I think that does help. I am pretty familiar with Cambodian customs because my wife is, and I know that a lot of Cambodians are illiterate, because a lot of immigrants to Canada don't come from the city and don't have the education because it was interrupted by the war. So I am aware of the situation, so that when there is an illiterate Cambodian, I am not surprised. There is a literacy class now, but I will try and address that problem.

He added that it is important not to make assumptions about students based upon their educational or cultural background. Although this statement may have been clarified in a follow-up interview, Steven seems to say that we should not define students' intelligence by their previous educational status.

> I mean, just because somebody is a Cambodian with no education doesn't mean that they are dumb, or just because there is a doctor in the class from Russia doesn't mean that he is smart. Or smart and dumb are not really intelligent words but that is in general intelligence. But also in their ability to learn a language, that has nothing to do with their intelligence or educational background either it seems. You try to go in with an open mind.

Although Steven said that level of education did not affect their ability to learn a language, he said that students' education levels did make a difference.

Students with more education were often looked to as the authority on a subject. Even though they were not necessarily talkative, other students may look upon them for their opinion. Furthermore,

> Generally the students who have more education, especially in sciences tend to be more analytic, want more written stuff, and the students who don't have as much formal education do not feel as comfortable or they don't feel they learn as much by writing, but they want more speaking.

In order to assist the students who felt less confident, Steven said that he would work with students, on their presentations, for example, to provide them with more confidence and authority on the subject.

Steven said that the sex of the students did not have a great impact on the classroom, although the topics about which they spoke would sometimes differ. He also said that occasionally he would be careful seating students beside one another if there could be a problem. Although he said that I may have noticed how the students relate to one another better than he did, he admitted that sometimes a husband may not want his wife to speak with another man.

> But I don't think about seating students according to gender. At least not at this stage. At the beginning I did, sometimes. Tieng I was very careful not to put with an aggressive young man. Those things I would try and watch. Or if some of the Muslim women, where they feel uncomfortable or their husbands don't want them to speak. It has happened before where they don't want them to speak to a man.

Steven it appears did not work against the cultural norms of the students, such as Muslim men not wanting their wives to speak to other men. This reflects the impact the sex-role expectations of a student's home environment is carried over into the classroom context. These women, disallowed from working with a certain portion of the classroom would be missing out on the opportunity to share ideas with other students. Rather than challenging this form of subjugation of women as possessions, it is considered and accepted into the classroom. I would have liked an explanation from Steven in regards to his rationale behind accepting this request of the husbands. Possible reasons include: the consequences for the woman if she speaks with men; the woman may be removed from school if she speaks with a man, or; the acceptance of other cultural practices, regardless of the power structures they represent.

From my conversations with Steven, it was interesting to what he attributed their lack of participation. With some students he said that it was due to difficulties they were having in their personal life, such as with Aisha. With Joseph and Czeslaw, he attributed their quietness to personality and laziness (respectively), although with some female students such as Ling, it was attributed to their being shy. When I spoke with Ling, she said that she liked the instructor to ask her questions, because otherwise she would not speak. It seems there are differences based on the gender, although I did not have the opportunity to investigate this with Steven.

## Summary

The four instructors provided insight into many factors which they have found influences student participation in the classroom. The heterogeneity within the classroom presents many challenges for the instructors in their instruction. Myriad interrelated factors impact the students' classroom behaviour, interests, and the instructors' perceptions. These factors include far more than the four general areas of investigation examined in this study. Some of the other factors identified by the instructors include degree of adjustment to their new life in Canada and individual personality.

The following chapter will present a summary of the findings, implications for practice and future research, and a personal reflection of the study.

# Chapter VI

# SUMMARY, REFLECTIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS

## Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine how students' gender, age, educational background, and culture influenced their perceptions of classroom participation and learning. Literature in the field of language instruction emphasizes the importance of classroom participation, and interaction in particular, for language learning. It was therefore deemed necessary to examine how individual characteristics and student backgrounds impact student participation and hence, learning. Many studies have examined these characteristics individually, however, there is a need to look beyond each individual factor, and examine their interrelationship. It is the influence of combined characteristics on a student, which result in the complex interaction patterns in the classroom. Often these classroom patterns reflect inequities which exist in society at large.

## Research Design, Data Collection and Analysis

The research was conducted using a qualitative case study approach. Augmented with observation and informal conversations with students and instructors, semi-structured interviews were the main form of data collection. The participating instructors were purposefully chosen, selecting experienced ESL instructors, two males and two females, who spoke English as a first

language. The two male instructors, Darrell and Steven, taught upper beginner level students, and the two female instructors, Carol and Alicia, taught intermediate level students. All of the students from these four classes were invited to participate in the interviews. In all, 48 of the 64 students from these classes were interviewed. Audio-taped interviews were held with the four instructors, after which they were provided with a transcript of the interview. Follow-up interviews were held with three of the four instructors. Every interview, both with instructors and students, were transcribed, and then analyzed. The transcriptions were read and then codified into themes and categories. These themes and categories were then used to organize the findings from each student and instructor. The student insights were compiled, and organized according to topic. Information from the instructors was used to construct a story which presents their experience and perceptions on the influence of gender, age, culture and educational background on the classroom.

Throughout the data collection and analysis, I felt overwhelmed by the volume of data being amassed. The diversity of student perceptions caused me to wonder whether I could do justice to the complexity and value of each students' experience and story. Because the data collection was completed at the end of the courses, it was not possible to return and re-examine ideas with students. The instructors had already shared many hours of their time with me, and one felt he did not have time to spare for the follow-up interview. Therefore, in writing these sections, I often talked with other instructors to obtain their view of the data and the analysis I had performed. I made great efforts to limit the bias caused by my own personal, professional, and academic experiences.

## Summary of Findings

The students and instructors discussed many ways which the diversity of the student population influenced participation and thus, learning. A wealth of information was gleaned from the student and instructor interviews. Every

participant shared their individual perspective of the classroom interaction; in some instances the views were similar to those of other participants, while at other times they contradicted one another. Perspectives were made on both an individual as well as of the overall classroom dynamic. The instructors normally presented their views of the students overall, expanding on ideas using examples of individual students in the classes, past or present. Instructors at this institution were fortunate in that they held mid-session interviews with students which provided more individual information regarding each student. This information was sometimes shared with me, if it assisted in understanding the situation of students within the classroom.

Findings from the student and instructor interviews are written in separate chapters. In this manner, information from the students and instructors about the influence of the gender, age, culture and educational background of the students on classroom participation were discussed independently. Dividing the findings also allowed the student perspective to be distinguished from that of the instructor. Presenting the insights obtained from students and instructors together may have diminished the perceived validity of issues identified by either group. Following will be a discussion of the findings from student interviews.

## Insights Obtained From Students

One of the issues identified by students was the influence of the level of formal education they had previously attained. In this regard, many students with lower levels of previous education expressed frustration at their perceived inability to understand and learn English. Students with higher levels of previous education felt more comfortable in the classroom and did not express difficulties learning grammar or understanding abstract concepts of the language.

Similarly, most students who had been exposed to a language other than their first language said that this helped them to learn English. They understood some grammatical concepts and were already familiar with expressing ideas in different languages. Even some students who had less formal education, but had learned a second language felt an advantage studying English. If the other

language was not English sometimes it would initially interfere with their study of English. Those students who had studied English before were able to progress quickly and often skipped levels. These students often only required to be reminded of grammar or vocabulary. Several students who had not studied English before mentioned that it is intimidating to have a student with a strong grasp of English together with students who had not studied much English before.

The previous education of students influenced the instruction and learning styles they were accustomed to. If students were not used to speaking or joking in class, they may appreciate this behaviour in others although they would not feel comfortable behaving in this way themselves. Some students from very strict educational contexts said that in their country of origin they used to feel fearful and often dreaded going to school. However, although the teacher was boss, students from some countries said they had been expected to speak in class, and these students state that in the ESL classes here in Canada they feel much more relaxed. Therefore, if students did not feel fear, they are more likely to speak and express themselves freely. Most of the students commented on how they appreciated the friendliness of the instructors, which made them feel comfortable and willing to speak or ask questions.

Nevertheless some students who had a high level of education before arriving in Canada felt a significant loss of status upon arrival in Canada. This change in status could affect their adjustment to their new life in Canada, and when combined with going into an ESL class where they become unknowing students could cause them to feel disoriented. Some students in this situation expressed a strong desire to become "normal" again. This desire could either paralyze them temporarily or increase their initiative to study, which they saw as a means of regaining a semblance of the life they had left.

Many contradictions appeared in the discussion of how gender influenced participation and learning in the classroom. Whereas some students said they felt no differences existed, others said that differences did indeed exist. Students often stated that there was no variance between male and female students, although implicit in the interviews were many gender differences. Many of the ways that the gender of a student impacted their classroom participation were not perceived as being gender based. Furthermore, students often said that it

was "no problem" having men and women in class together; this does not refute the existence of difference, but instead reflects an acceptance of being together with students of the opposite sex. For many students who recognized or felt the influence of gender on student behaviour or participation, many were unable to express it. The majority of the issues relating to gender and participation were revealed through an examination of commonalties amongst the issues addressed by the students.

Comments relating to gendered behaviour often related to behaviours or attitudes which students found to be problematic. Some women in the lower levels, for example, stated that some men are "too strong" or "too loud." One student in Darrell's class also commented on how one young male often bothered the young women in the class. Many students said that this young male talked incessantly and did not respect the other students. In fact, he stated that he would speak if he wanted to, regardless of how others felt. This sentiment was echoed by several male students in three of the four classes, but not one woman mentioned feeling this unlimited right to exercise their speech in class. Furthermore, several women said that they wished their instructor would tell them to be quiet to give others an opportunity to speak, and one man, Sergei, expressed surprise that the teacher was not stronger in actively balancing participation.

An enlightening moment happended during the student interview with Cam, because while speaking with Cam, Svetlana entered the room as well as the conversation. When it was mentioned that some students in the class were very quiet, I asked what Steven did to help them speak more in the class. Svetlana said that he does not do anything, but Cam disagreed. Cam denied what Svetlana said, asking how Svetlana could read her thoughts, with Svetlana replying that it was because they knew one another so well. The following conversation arose from my question.

> Svetlana: I think is no. No, like if for example if I teacher and I never hear you talk, every fifteen minutes I will ask her something.
>
> Cam: Yeah, if someone is really quiet they must speak because it is good for them.
>
> Lori: Does the teacher ask questions to the quieter students?

Cam: Sometimes. When we do exercise. Everybody must answer about his question.

Svetlana: (Shaking her head "No") Yeah, but if I talk too much, maybe it is better if he says no, you maybe somebody else. Like Tuyet, two or three or four times.

Cam: Look, she my boss. You ask me and she answers.

Svetlana: Yeah, you understand the question, but you don't want to tell the truth.

Cam: Why you know what I mean.

Svetlana: I know what you mean, I spend with you five months. Yeah. (CAM and SVETLANA, Steven)

Following this conversation with Cam and Svetlana, Svetlana said that she felt the interaction in the classroom to be very imbalanced. The more quiet women were rarely asked to speak, and if they could not answer immediately the answer was provided for them. When I pointed out that Cam disagreed, Svetlana said that the students are sometimes afraid to criticize the class for fear of losing the class.

Women were often said to be shier, quieter and more reluctant to speak than the male students. This view was expressed by both women and men, although not all women fit into the category of shy and nervous students. Many of the quieter women expressed confusion and frustration at their reluctance and/or ability to speak; they wanted to speak more but felt that they could not. These feelings were more common in the lower level classes, although some in the intermediate levels felt similar frustration. A lack of confidence in their own ability could be observed in many of these women, and interestingly many of them also came from a more traditional background with lower levels of education. These factors (gender, culture, and education) may account for the shyness and reluctance expressed by many female students.

Although most comments regarding the participation of women discussed a shyness or nervousness, there were also comments emphasizing the strong nature of some women. These comments normally referred to European women, who were occasionally said to be "aggressive." It is interesting that students commented on both talkative and quiet men being intelligent, adding that they

enjoyed listening when these men (usually European, one from Egypt) speak. Similar comments were not made about either quiet nor outgoing female students.

Sex roles were also found to influence women's ability to study, inside and outside of the classroom. Because many female immigrants are young married women, they may either be pregnant or have young children at the time they are in school. The pregnant women identified fatigue and morning sickness as affecting them. Having to sit for extended periods of time in a hot classroom was also reported to be difficult for pregnant women. These women did not mention this to the instructor; one student said she was embarrassed to talk to the instructor about it. Furthermore, none of the instructors identified this as an issue. Apart from pregnancy, many women mentioned the effects of familial responsibility as affecting their opportunity to study English. Many women mentioned that they did not have the time or the place to study at home, because they needed to cook, clean, take care of their children, and sometimes care for aged parents. Several women mentioned they felt lucky when their husbands helped them at home. For single mothers, the pressures of caring for their families alone placed overwhelming pressures on them. Several mothers mentioned that they slept very little, and would often arrive at school early to complete their homework. None of the men in the study were single fathers, and even the married fathers did not mention this to be a factor. They said they had time to study at home, and could focus on their English practice.

Students also discussed the differences between male and female teachers. Most of the students who commented on this said that they felt female teachers were more friendly than male teachers, who seemed to be more emotionally removed. Carlos, from Darrell's class, said that men are more serious and rigid, whereas women have "feelings for teaching." Although some students said that they found female teachers to be more approachable, others refuted this. Gnoc, from Darrell's class, said that she preferred male teachers, because she felt women could be more patronizing. Even though students disagreed on what the differences between male and female teachers were, what did appear universal was a need for the teacher to demonstrate a respect for the students, as well as an interest in their well-being.

The students presented many opinions regarding the influence of the multicultural composition of their classroom on their own classroom participation, as well as that of their classmates. Whereas some students felt that the nationality or culture of an individual was irrelevant within the classroom context, others felt the diversity to be advantageous or disadvantageous. Many students emphasized the importance of looking beyond the surface of another student and seeing who they really are. Some students also felt that the common interests and experiences they shared as immigrants learning English, should also be emphasized as a unifying factor in the classroom.

In spite of the similarities, cultural and linguistic backgrounds were seen as causing some differences in the opportunities for students to participate. Pronunciation was most commonly cited as being a problem when working with students from different countries. Difficulties with pronunciation occasionally caused tension and anger, because some students did not want to work with others who had unintelligible pronunciation. Sometimes the teacher would intervene in these instances, with varied success. Asian students were said to have the greatest difficulties with pronunciation, and students from Europe and South America were said to have better pronunciation. Nevertheless, students mentioned that although they may not understand certain accents initially, with time they were better able to understand the difficult accents.

Another cultural factor which students felt strongly about were the advantages and disadvantages of having several students of the same linguistic background in the same classroom. If there are many students who speak the same language together in a class, there is a tendency for them to speak that language in class. Occasionally it assists with comprehension, but at other times it can cause distraction for everyone in the class. Usually students felt that they liked having students from different linguistic backgrounds together, because it was necessary to speak English. In this way, students were forced to practice their English if they wished to converse with one another. Nevertheless, complex ideas were difficult for students to express in English, and in these instances, they would often use their first language. Perhaps for this reason students of the same language would often meet at coffee breaks and lunch time and talk about issues affecting their lives.

Having students from different cultural backgrounds also enabled students to share information about their different countries of origin, customs, and people. Many students mentioned that they enjoyed this aspect of the class, because it helped them to understand one another better. Some students also said that they enjoy learning about different countries, for they had not been exposed to people of different nationalities and there were many interesting ideas or customs they could discover. Nevertheless, discussions on culture could sometimes result in disagreements, and the instructor would need to step in and calm the students.

For some students, speaking about their country of origin could be difficult, especially if they have negative memories. If students had to leave important people behind, or if they had been forced to leave their country, there was a great emotional attachment to what they said. Some students would feel reluctant to speak about it, or sad when they thought of their loved ones back home, or of the strife which had destroyed their life back home.

Similarly, students said that some topics were impossible to talk or write about, if it related to negative experiences. Dilemmas could arise if the cause of a student's emotional or physical suffering was seen as being related to an experience, such as war, in which students of the opposing side are in the same class. Some topics were said to cause a student to feel reluctant or uncomfortable addressing, such as: "describe one happy experience and one unhappy experience," "describe the city you lived in" or "describe your job in your country." Zelimer said that as a refugee, even something as apparently neutral as "describe your job" could be difficult to do, but adds that "I think it is difficult situation for the teacher to understand, and I think teacher maybe doesn't understand." He suggested a variety of topics to choose from would help him to be able to write and not feel constrained.

Students may also find other students' behaviour unacceptable due to differences in culture. What one student may find appropriate, others may find disagreeable. Eating in class, burping, interrupting the instructor, and speaking too loudly were some of the differences mentioned which bothered students. These differences could result in students feeling uncomfortable in the class or reluctant to participate. Some students did not care how others felt as a result of their behaviour, while others mentioned that they sometimes felt uncomfortable

receiving disapproving looks from other students. Adrian, from Darrell's class, was pregnant and mentioned that she knew others felt uncomfortable when she ate in class, but she had to eat snacks in order to control her nausea; the physical need she has overweighs the concern of making others uncomfortable by her eating.

Students also saw their participation and that of their classmates influenced by their country of origin, while others disagreed. Many said that there was a tendency for Asians to speak less and Europeans to speak more, while other students felt that the varied participation levels were based on individual personality. Nevertheless, one student said that he found it surprising that some students (from Vietnam) were quieter than him (from China), because one had been a teacher in Vietnam, and therefore should feel comfortable to speak in class. This points to the professional as well as ethnic background of as student, which may sometimes redress a cultural tendency to be quiet in class, but in this instance did not.

The fourth area of investigation was age, which seemed to be more readily confounded by sex, education, and culture. Although many students felt that age was irrelevant for learning English, others mentioned some variance in participation and learning according to age. Some students felt that younger students have an advantage in the classroom, and that they learn faster than older students. Some of this advantage students felt could be attributed to the physical effects of aging, such as memory, and reaction time. Other possible factors could be the amount of responsibility people of different life stages tend to have. Older individuals tend to have family and financial responsibilities, while young adults are often single and sometimes live with their parents. Furthermore, frequently older adults have been out of school longer, and need to reacquaint themselves with the classroom and classroom learning strategies; however, for students with lower levels of education, becoming accustomed to the classroom seemed more difficult than becoming reaccustomed.

If students belonged to a similar age group then the differences were less obvious, but extreme age differences were felt to be influential in the classroom. Some students who are very young may not feel that they have experience to share in the classroom, although others mention that they feel the constraints of their age less here in Canada. For some students age was not a factor in the

classroom, but they did notice who was the youngest student in the class. Older students seemed to feel that their age did not matter in the class, although the older women often appeared to see themselves as a "mother" to other students, as Aurora from Darrell's class stated: "I am like your mother. I am already 63."

Very young students were seen by some students to bring an essential youthful energy to the classroom. Some older students mentioned that they would not like being in a classroom of only older students, as they thought it may be tiresome and uninteresting. Long (1990) points out that a "reduction in overall everygy levels in adult learners also presents a problem for adult learners and teachers" (p.29). Insensitibity to this diminished evergy can result in reduced attention levels and at worst, possibly, physical withdrawal from the learning situation. However, Azim from Alicia's class said that he actually felt younger in the classroom, in part because of the younger students with whom he was studying, but also because of the fact he could forget some of his domestic responsibilities. In the classroom he was a student again, which he associated with youth.

Age could also affect the goals which students felt were attainable. Older students felt that their advanced years did not allow them to pursue professions which would require a large amount of upgrading. They felt that by the time they received their qualifications they would be ready to retire. For younger students, this was less of an issue as they had many years to continue their studies, receive their qualifications and start a career. Therefore, the younger students who wished to continue their studies in Canada felt increased pressure to attain a high proficiency in English. They studied in order to obtain a goal, which was very clear for them.

Preceding is a discussion of the ways in which students feel the four areas influence their participation and learning in the classroom. Following is a summary of the ways the instructors felt diversity influenced student participation in the classroom.

## Insights Obtained From Instructors

The four instructors participating in this study had extensive experience instructing ESL. Darrell taught the lowest level class included in the research (low Core E). Steven taught a higher level Core E class. Carol taught an intermediate level class for incoming students, and Alicia taught an intermediate class for ongoing students. Each classroom population was unique, with its individual characteristics. Furthermore, each instructor had his or her own teaching style and ideology relating to the teaching and learning process. As a result, at times, similar issues were perceived differently; at other times, all four teachers would express the same opinion.

The instructors provided a wealth of information regarding their observations on the influences of age, gender, educational background, and culture on the participation of students in the classroom. Diversity was an important issue in all classes, because there was not only diversity in relation to age, culture, and educational background of male and female students, but also because there was variance in the level of students desire and ability to speak, write, read and listen in the class. Although each level represents a certain range of English proficiency, each level may still encompass a spectrum of abilities. Even when the classes are more homogeneous in relation to participation levels, as discussed by Carol, there are challenges associated with having predominantly quiet or predominantly outgoing students. The inherently heterogeneous nature of the ESL classroom presents interesting challenges for the instructor, because the instructor has a different student body every ten weeks, and especially as class sizes are increasing.

The importance of respecting the knowledge and experience that each student brings into the class was universally recognized by the four instructors. Darrell stressed that the students are adults, and should be treated as such, with the respect one would give a peer; the students lack English, not life experience. This echoes some of the beliefs regarding adult learning principles discussed almost two decades ago by Knowles (1980). Although his ideas regarding adult learning have been challenged, participants in this study concur that adults who have lived longer "have accumulated a greater *volume* of experience. But they have also had different *kinds* of experience" (p.50). Some students felt they had

nothing to share because they were younger and lack the life experience of older students. Other students lack confidence because they have few years of formal education. Regardless of their age or social position, the instructors stated the importance in respecting all students as human beings. Some students may have more years of experience, but they still have life experiences and knowledge that they can bring into the class.

In relation to age, three of the instructors felt that extreme differences in age raised some issues in the class. Darrell felt that age difference was not important, although it is important to understand that the students are adults. Other instructors mentioned that one of the difference is that older students, especially older men with professional careers, looked for respect from other students. Instructors said that if the student appeared to expect respect, they would pay respect to older students as a model for other students to follow. This would lessen tension in the classroom which may result if students have different understandings of respect for the elderly, which may vary by cultural group. Older students may also take on a parenting role in the class, demonstrating disapproval of behaviours of younger students. Older men sometimes behaved in an authoritarian fashion, while older women tended to be nurturing or matriarchal. At times, the older students would express their disbelief that the instructor would allow behaviour in the class which they felt to be unacceptable, such as joking. On other occasions, elder students may reprimand younger students, causing tension in the class and suppressing conversations.

The fact that older students would be paid more respect may relieve tension, but could cause much younger students to feel that their experience is less valued. Younger students may feel increasingly reluctant to speak, unless the instructor is able to compensate for the lesser respect paid to younger students.

The instructors said that younger students brought youthful energy to the class, but may feel that they lack life experience to share in class. Some younger students may not have thought about certain issues or experienced that which most older students had. Both Carol and Alicia mentioned that young students, males in particular, may respond by being flippant or withdrawn to cope with these feelings. The instructors said it was important to identify topics which younger students could participate in, and discover achievements of these

students about which they could speak so that they have more authority in the classroom. Nevertheless, situations arise when students feel they have nothing to share in the class, regardless of how much the instructor prepares.

The effects of aging could also influence the participation of students in the classroom. Carol pointed out that some, not all, older students are slower learners. This coincides with the frustration expressed by some students that older students' memories and reflexes were not as fast as those of younger students. However, some older students with higher levels of education and professional careers were faster learners. Perhaps it is because they have exercised their minds over the years, maintaining their capacity to learn and remember new items.

Older students could also be disadvantaged by physical aging. Visible signs of aging may not affect adults as much as less visible characteristics.

> For example, the adult appearance, e.g., mature facial configuration, body size, and other evidence of increasing age such as gray hair, wrinkles, crow's feet and so forth may not have very important consequences for learning. Yet, some of the less apparent characteristics, such as diminished auditory and visual acuity, reduced energy levels, and increasing frequency of health problems are more substantive considerations. (Long, 1990, p.28-29)

As people age, their hearing, sight, and motor dexterity may have been affected. Carol mentioned that in her class was a student, Fong, who at the mid-session interview mentioned that she could not see the blackboard. Fong was not able to learn from visual aids, and therefore compensated by concentrating on listening. Carol did not attribute her not looking up to vision problems, although it may be misunderstood as not paying attention. Besides vision problems older students are more likely to have arthritis, or limited hearing or motor skills. Thus the instructors may need to anticipate physical signs of aging, and develop materials and activities which compensate for these problems.

In relation to the effects of previous education on the students' participation and learning, four main areas were identified. These four areas were: instruction style, level of analytical ability, learning strategies and confidence. The four instructors felt that the instructional styles predominantly used here in Canada are different from those used in other countries. They felt

that students like the Canadian instructional style where students participate more actively. This coincides with some of the statements made by students that they like the friendly teachers here in Canada, where they do not fear going to school; some students dreaded going to school in their home country. Nevertheless, students sometimes need to be encouraged to leave the comfort of quietly sitting in the class and letting others take the risk. Darrell stressed the importance of being flexible in our teaching style and even utilizing strategies which would be more common in other countries and which students would be familiar with. Using varied strategies, including ones which students may have experienced in their country of origin would give rise to a learning environment which many students may be familiar with. It would also demonstrate that the learning styles and teaching styles that the students had been exposed to were valued, and consequently their previous knowledge is also seen to be valuable.

Carol and Darrell said that they felt it is important to vary the kinds of activities utilized in the classroom. This will not only help students practice varied English competencies, but would also address varied learning styles of the students. Each activity should, as much as possible, include visual, oral, tactile, and auditory aspects to exercise different abilities. Although he was speaking in relation to the facilitation of discussion in the classroom, Brookfield (1990), stresses the importance of utilizing varied approaches. The following statement can be seen to apply to varied learning activities, not only discussion.

> Every learning group comprises individuals with idiosyncratic personalities, learning styles, different cultural backgrounds, varying expectations, and a multiplicity of motives for learning. To expect one approach to be perceived by all group members as being relevant, congenial, and connected to their own experiences is wholly unrealistic. (p.196)

In respect to previous education, instructors seem to have greater awareness of strategies to address cultural learning styles than with strategies to address lower levels of education. Instructors frequently mentioned the difficulties for students who had less education, but reported few strategies. Literacy students had a separate class, but if students are literate they are placed in a classroom based upon the English ability they demonstrate on the placement

test. Students with less education appear to have an obvious disadvantage in the classroom and the ESL instruction they receive will not be able to compensate for skills they have not had the opportunity to develop. Nevertheless, some strategies may be utilized to the benefit of these students, who may not be able to fully participate in the class if they lack analytical skills.

The instructors mentioned a difference in the degree of analytical thought made by students with varied levels of previous education. Students with very little previous education sometimes showed fear of the academic side of language learning, such as grammar. Students with high levels of academic achievement in their home country tend to focus on the rules of the language, aiming for correctness, while those with less education tend to focus on expressing their ideas, regardless of mistakes. Carol points out that part of this may be because many students with less formal education do not know how to look up verb forms in a textbook or a word in a dictionary. This resulted in students guessing answers, thus limiting their correctness, while providing them with analytical skills may help address this difference.

The level of understanding of grammatical and abstract concepts can also affect students' self-confidence. Even if a student has a reasonably strong oral ability, such as Aurora in Darrell's class, he or she may feel intimidated by the academic segments of the lesson. This feeling of intimidation can be increased if a student with little understanding of the academic side of the language is sitting beside a student with University understanding who rapidly grasps new concepts. Although the instructors recognized the different levels of confidence, few strategies were forwarded to address the disadvantage students with less education would experience. Carol suggested guiding students through the analytical process, including how to use a dictionary or textbook as a resource. Alicia mentioned using gestures to visually reinforce what was said.

The effects of having studied other languages previously was not specifically mentioned by the instructors. While some students felt that students who had studied a lot of English before should not be together with new students, others felt that it was beneficial to have students with more knowledge to learn from. The instructors did not address this, although the different levels of familiarity with the different aspects of English was mentioned. The instructors mentioned the dilemma every instructor faces when instructing an

aspect of the language which some students are very familiar with, and others have never seen. The challenge is to teach this topic in a way that no one is bored nor lost. As stated by Laberge (1992), students who have studied grammar extensively may feel that they do not require more grammar, while others may require thorough instruction. Students who had learned a foreign language other than English, also had advantages, which the instructors did not identify. Students who knew several languages were already familiar with grammatical and linguistic aspects of language learning and have the skills to learn a language which they can transfer into their English studies. This aspect of a student's past was not mentioned by the instructors as playing a role in the participation of the students, although it seemed to indeed influence the students comfort with and ability to participate.

In relation to the cultural background of students, instructors recognized the tendency to generalize, and the need to avoid stereotypes. Some instructors felt that generalizations often occur and may assist an instructor teaching a multi-cultural student population. Instructors are not able to perform a formal individual needs assessment for each student to find the strengths and weaknesses of each student; neither can they learn every intricacy of the students' cultures. Generalizations may assist the instructor in identifying initial areas of focus for the lessons, making changes as required. They can also assist in knowing about cultural norms which students may follow, helping students feel more comfortable. The instructors emphasized the importance of not stereotyping, and similar to that stated by Valdes (1986), it is important not to expect all members of a culture to conform to the generalization. Remaining flexible and openminded are important considerations for the instructors, because there are many instances when the generalizations do not apply.

The instructors also mentioned that students enjoyed learning about one another's culture. Each class had a culture segment, when students talked about aspects of their country of origin or their traditions. Alicia found this to be a wonderful opportunity for students who lack confidence to shine. As the students discussed aspects of their lives about which other students were not familiar, they could feel a sense of achievement. For these presentations, the instructors also mentioned working with less confident students to help give them more authority over the topic about which they speak. And, even outside

of these specific culture segments of the class, spontaneous conversations relating to cultural differences often arise. On these occasions the students are prone to be curious and ask questions.

Spontaneous conversations about cultural differences often result in interest and understanding of one another, but may also cause tension and conflict. The instructors said that on these occasions they would need to step in and mediate. As mentioned by Macleod (1980), introducing the idea of cultural relativity may assist in abating some of the tension, stressing the idea of cultures being different, not better and worse. This helps diminish some of the tension, but on some occasions it is difficult to achieve the idea of difference as opposed to making judgments, especially when, as Ovando and Collier (1985) say, when values are in opposition with one another. This can cause great challenges for the instructors and students working together, but it is a situation which everyone will face in their daily life outside of school and the classroom can be a safe environment in which to address some of these issues.

Another source of tension and conflict in the classroom is accent. Students would not want to work with students who have poor pronunciation, and would sometimes request that the teacher not pair them with certain students. The instructors all recognized this to be an issue, and all said that they felt it unacceptable. Alternating partners, so that not any student would always have to work with only one other student was one strategy used to address this problem. Also, the instructors did not allow students to refuse to work with other students. The instructors would explain the importance of speaking with students of varied accents, using workplace analogies for example. Alicia said that in the workforce you can not decide not to speak with a co-worker because he or she is difficult to understand, or it may be a supervisor who has an accent. Learning strategies to facilitate understanding is an important and transferable skill. Both students and instructors mentioned that after being exposed and accustomed to different accents, they were better able to understand even difficult accents.

The instructors also frequently mentioned the cultural influence on gender behaviour. A students' predilection to speak or to remain quietly in the background may be a result of both gender and culture. The preferences for different activities or topics may also be related to culture and gender. Darrell

said that although these trends are not absolute, most Vietnamese women are shy and quiet and do not like to discuss controversial news articles. Although he is not sure why this occurs, he feels that there may be a cultural dimension to it. Students from Europe and Latin America, for instance, seem to enjoy news articles, which further suggests a cultural preference. Therefore, Darrell suggests using a variety of articles, addressing different issues and allowing students to select the articles of interest.

Gender differences were reported by the instructors, and as stated above, culture was seen to play a role in determining the degree of difference. It was pointed out that students, both male and female, have been socialized to behave in certain ways. This socialization continues throughout a person's life, and Carol believes that an instructor should not expect these behaviours to change when the student enters the classroom. Although the instructor may attempt to balance participation, these behaviours are "ingrained in our personality" (Carol) and difficult to modify. Some of these socialized behaviours were that men tended to be more outgoing and adventuresome, while women tended to be more analytical and restrained. Carol felt that some young men could seem immature even though they are only 'acting their age,' while others could be responsible students, whom she felt consequently resembled the young women. Alicia stated that she found more differences between male and female behaviours in the lower levels, and the only difference she noted in the intermediate level was that women may be more analytical.

Nevertheless, as Sadker and Sadker (1994) point out, it is not easy to identify gender bias, even when you are looking for it. Some of the gender differences mentioned by students were not mentioned by the instructors. Furthermore, during observations in the classroom, differential amounts and quality of feedback were given to men and women. The instructors also identified causes for behaviours differently in relation to the sex of the student. For instance, Steven felt that women in his class were quiet because they were shy; men were quiet because they were lazy or that was their personality. Men's contributions were appreciated for the value of the information presented. Women's contributions were commonly commented on in relation to their nurturing nature.

Certain gendered behaviours were appreciated and reinforced by the instructors. For instance, the nurturing tendencies of some older women or the adventuresome nature of male learners were commended. Complimenting and reinforcing positive student behaviours is a natural part of teaching, however encouraging nurturing behaviour will not directly lead to gains in the classroom. As pointed out by Sadker and Sadker ( 1990, 1994), female students often receive feedback on style rather than content, which devalues their achievements and could lessen their goals and expectations. Although the instructors do not intend to behave differentially toward male and female students, there were instances when it occurred.

Some behaviours of men and women which did not fit expectations caused surprise and on occasion a negative reaction. One example of this is Alicia's reaction to strong women, whom she felt intimidated the men. Although these women may not have been as strong as some men, they were perhaps stronger than a woman is expected to be. Often women from Eastern Europe were deemed strong and even aggressive. This may signify a culturally determined behaviour which does not 'produce' submissive women. Nevertheless, according to Alicia one of the strong and outgoing women in her class did not ask many questions and needed a lot of feedback, and as such it is not clear in what ways they were strong. As pointed out by Bilken and Pollard (1993), the priveledge of certain women may overshadow the need to address the disadvantage of other women. This, they claim, stresses the need to look beyond sex, because "gender is not a finite, homogeneous classification" (p.7). Other examples include Joseph, who was a very quiet Polish man. Normally European students were talkative, especially men, and consequently Joseph's reticence was puzzling.

As mentioned by Kelly (1991) men often control interaction by initiating topics and conversations. This may explain why certain male students would ask many questions, occasionally about things not directly related to the topic being covered at that time. In Alicia's class, two males asked many questions. One of these males was more insistent than the other, and although Alicia admitted feeling that she would like to ask him to wait until during the break, she would often oblige him and answer his questions. The other male was less insistent and asked questions which were of a more general nature. The

outgoing female students may have asked fewer questions, but were rarely hesitant to answer questions. Furthermore, some women would develop side conversations with their neighbor when the topic was one not of interest to them.

The instructors also identified factors which strongly determined levels of participation and achievement, but which do not directly relate to age, sex, culture, or educational background. The first of these was stability. Steven said that students who had attained a certain level of certainty in their life were more likely to participate in the class. This may be due to the decreased amount of distraction they may feel from domestic, financial, or professional worries. The factor which Darrell felt most strongly impacted student participation was having defined objectives. Students with goals may focus their attention on what they need to achieve those goals, and asking questions related to their area of interest.

Carol and Alicia both emphasized the need to recognize that students may have had negative experiences, of which the instructor may not be aware. Nevertheless, these two instructors addressed these issues differently. Alicia followed a more therapeutic approach, believing that self-actualization of students would occur when key moments in student lives were identified and introduced in the class. Alicia said that:

> I have found that some of these very withdrawn, quiet people have had a lot of pain in their lives, and I have seen situations where I've drawn them out when they have cried in sharing. But it has brought the rest of the group to tears too. (Alicia)

Carol, on the other hand, felt that while discussion of negative experiences may occur in the class, the instructor should listen, and then carefully draw the attention in another direction. If a student makes a disclosure, Carol said that the student may later regret having said that, and other students may not be able to handle the disclosure either. Similarly, Carol felt that an ESL instructor is not qualified as a psychologist and should not attempt to counsel students. She felt that the role of the instructor was to acknowledge their experiences in a more private moment, and to direct them to resources they can access if they are interested.

It was also mentioned that students may not feel comfortable talking about negative experiences, especially in front of a large group. Carol used letters from the students to provide them with a means to communicate difficult situations to her in a confidential fashion. As mentioned in the student interviews, some students felt reluctant to speak about their past if the memory was negative. These feelings intensified if students from opposing sides in the home country, such as in a civil war, are in a class together. Having a variety of topics from which to choose was a welcome option, because in this way students could make topics as personal or general as they feel comfortable with.

## Implications for Practice

The insights obtained from students and instructors provide a foundation for understanding the effects of diversity within the ESL classroom. Many issues were identified which will help increase awareness of the ways students' participation and learning can be (dis)advantaged, based upon their individual characteristics. Discussion of the resulting challenges faced by instructors and students provided the basis for consideration of instructional strategies. The complexity of the effects of interrelated factors precludes acceptance of any strategy without due reflection of the classroom population and dynamics. The strategies presented are suggestions, which some instructors may already use or consider in their practice, and which the participants of the study deemed beneficial.

Before listing the strategies mentioned by participants in the study, it is necessary to examine the emphasis commonly placed on strategies, and the possible reasons for this. Understanding instructional strategies is indeed important, and possession of a varied repertoire for teaching is beneficial for both teachers and students. Instructors in this study stressed the desire to learn new strategies, but felt that their years of experience had already sensitized them to the influence of sociocultural factors in the classroom. This emphasis placed on strategies, to the exclusion of other concerns in the field of education, can be

perceived in several ways. First, teachers may question their position as instructors, and identification of teaching strategies may assist the instructor in defining their role as teacher. In a presentation entitled "By Virtue of Being White," Carol Schick (a doctoral student at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, OISE/UT) stated that the use of teaching strategies confirms the identity of the teacher. Second, teaching strategies can remove some sense of responsibility from the instructor. If instructors are following a predetermined, proven strategy, the instructor need not concern themselves with the myriad other issues which arise in the classroom. Schick also felt that having parameters set by a lesson plan or defined instructional strategies can remove the sense of obligation or responsibility on the part of the teacher. If the strategy or lesson plan does not address the needs of all students, the instructor may feel consoled that it is not his or her fault. They may feel that they have performed their role as "teacher." Having uttered this caveat, it is important to add that strategies do assist instructors, but need to be complemented by self-reflection on the part of the teacher.

Some of the strategies identified by the instructors to balance participation were:

- Place quiet students with sympathetic partners. Initially be careful with pairing of students, until students feel comfortable with one another in the classroom.
- Change partners and alternate student seats every one or two weeks.
- Vary activities to address different learning styles.
- Promote the idea of sharing one's opinion. Encourage students to ask questions.
- Invite students to participate and give them time to answer. Some students feel it is important to be directly asked to speak, but not forced. Talkative students should be asked to be quiet at times to provide quiet students with an opportunity to speak.
- Recognize special days, such as birthdays.
- Show caring; for example, ask about a student if he or she was absent, but in a way to demonstrate interest and not criticism.

- Use body language to control interaction, such as actively ignoring students who are interrupting. Eye contact is powerful in inviting or excluding participation.
- Use proximity to students to limit disruptive behaviours.
- Try to recognize students who have not spoken and provide them with opportunities.
- Validate students as much as possible. Remember to balance comments about both academic and personal attributes for all students.
- Provide students with strategies to address lack of comprehension, such as asking for clarification or repetition.
- Work together with students to develop familiarity with analytical processes.
- Offer a variety of topics and allow students to choose the topic which interests them.
- Have the students write letters to the teacher, which provides both a structure for the assignment and the confidentiality to express thoughts or concerns.
- Use student writing and speech as a source of instructional materials, which provides more relevance to the lesson.
- Make the grammar lessons flow and, use language as it is really used, not artificial as it appears in grammar books. This will benefit all students, but especially those who will learn how to use the language even if they do not understand the academic grammar lesson.
- Work with quiet, less confident students on a question, practice the answer with them, and then ask that question in a large group to provide them the opportunity for success.

## Areas of Further Research

Many questions arose as a result of researching the effects of diversity on student participation and learning. Future research can be performed in order to arrive at a better understanding of these questions.

Generalizations and Exceptions: Although instructors identified tendencies and commented on generalizations or exceptions to generalizations, all stressed the current restricted discussion of generalizations. Most instructors have noticed tendencies, as well as exceptions, to these generalizations, but stress the importance of seeing each student as an individual. Reluctance to speak about these perceived tendencies may prevent instructors from reflecting on how these perceptions influence their behaviour. An interesting line of research would be to examine the effect the discouragment of discussion of generalizations may have on the classroom, and identifying the level of awareness instructors possess of any possible stereotyping. Furthermore, although instructors perceive exceptions to these tendencies, there is not an understanding of the causes of some of these exceptions. Understanding the reasons why students are outgoing while others are quiet, or vice versa, may provide useful information for instruction.

Un/Expected Gendered Behaviour The relationship between culture and sex was also identified, but the effect of different values or socialization on classroom interaction and teacher responses were not well understood. Because gendered behaviour varies between cultures, and when behaviour fell outside the expected perimiters, this behaviour was noticed. Masculinity and femininity are not absolute, and student behaviours vary more when mediated by culture. If students did not fit within expected behaviour patterns, the instructors often expressed surprise. Some students were disadvantaged because of this behaviour while others demonstrate advantage. An investigation of how instructors and classmates respond to students who do not fit within expected behaviour patterns may prove beneficial.

Gender Roles Although the instructors were all aware of the popular discussions of gender differences, there was less understanding of the effects of sex roles on student participation and learning. Much of the emphasis was on linguistic aspects of learning, for which little difference was perceived. Instructors and students both recognized that male students were often stronger than female students, although there were exceptions identified as well. Nevertheless, issues including pregnancy and familial responsibilities for the women were not identified by instructors. Further research may wish to examine ways in which gender roles, both inside and outside the classrrom, may affect male and female students.

Generational Differences Another line of investigation is the impact of varied student ages. Issues of maturity, experience, respect, and the physical affects of aging were identified in the study. It may be worthwhile examining how these factors interrelate to negate or compound advantage or disadvantage in the classrroom. Differences between men and women of different ages were also identified. Research may be performed to examine how these differences influence student participation and learning.

Previous Education Although all instructors recognized the impact of previous learning on the classroom, little was known of how to address the different levels of previous education. The exposure to formal education seemed to have a great impact on the students' ability and confidence to perform analytically in the classroom. Students with more formal education progressed more rapidly and demonstrated more confidence compared with students with little formal schooling. Being less visible than culture, sex, or age, previous education may not be as evident, and therefore may be overlooked more readily. Furthermore, this distinction does not cause much tension or conflict in the classsroom, and is therefore a less immediate concern. Nevertheless, the impact on student participation appears great, and would be a very important area of future research, especially in its relationship with other factors.

In-Depth Study Examining the interrelated nature of factors which influence student participation and learning has only recently begun. Research has usually examined gender, age, educational background and culture separately, which may determine the individual classroom impact but not the compounding influences. Many ways in which these factors influence

participation were identified in this initial examination of classroom participation. The large scope of this research, which included observing four classrooms, and interviewing 48 student and 4 instructors, did not allow for an in-depth investigation of the issues identified. Although this research attempted to go beyond a fragmented examination of the diversity, it was necessary to fragment the data in order to provide a comprehensible discussion of the findings. The immense volume of information, replete with contradictions and exceptions, seemed nonsensical if presented together. Future research may wish to examine a smaller group of participants to attain a more profound understanding of some of the issues identified here.

Action Research This research limited itself to investigating how student characteristics influence their learning opportunities. It may be useful to integrate an action research methodology to work through issues identified by teachers and students in an attempt to develop greater equity in the classroom.

Normalization While conducting this research the idea of becoming a Canadian was often mentioned. Students often commented on the importance of learning English for becoming Canadian. References were made to both the need to discourage behaviours which may be deemed inappropriate, or detrimental to their future, in Canada, and the need to encourage and respect diversity. These appear to stand in contradiction to one another. Future research may wish to examine the extent to which these contradictory goals of ESL instruction, or instruction in general, may influence policy or classroom practice. Furthermore, an examination of what is deemed "Canadian Culture" may also prove insightful, for as mentioned by Friesen (1993), during the period of immigration between 1896 until 1914

> it was expected that newcomers would adopt the values and institutions of Anglophone Canadian society. There was virtually no thought given to the possiblity that WASP values might not be the apex of civilization which all citizens should strive for." (p.85)

An examination of the extent to which this sentiment continues or is resisted today may help to better identify the role of ESL, especially in relation to citizenship education.

# Reflections

As I near the completion of this stage of my research, I have become acutely aware of its strengths and weaknesses. This was a long and challenging research project, and I wish that I had had more experience before taking it on. Throughout the research project the value of the research became increasingly apparent, as did the desire to suitably present the findings. Perhaps one of the greatest frustrations was that the findings appeared fragmented and trivial once placed on paper. Great effort was made to be true to the data, and not detract from the value of the information obtained.

As the research progressed, the need to reflect upon my own biases and assumptions became increasingly important. It was necessary to ask myself: what are my assumptions and feelings on this subject, and how could this affect my analysis? To the best of my ability, I have attempted to present the data without much analysis. This allowed the perceptions of the participants to be prominent. On occasion my own feelings on a topic were very strong, and it was extremely important to separate my own sentiments from the data presented. It was more difficult to recognize the necessity when my own biases were more subtle and concealed. Discussing the analysis with colleagues was a means to confirm the findings and reduce the bias.

The experience of observing these four classes and speaking with the instructors and students was very rewarding. Few instructors have the opportunity to sit in on other classes and learn from the practice of experienced instructors. It was also extremely insightful to speak with so many students regarding their opinions of the teaching learning environment. Because some of the students had very low English proficiency, they had difficulties expressing their ideas. Nevertheless, students provided me with priceless insights, which they made great efforts to express. Sometimes, however, the insights gained from the observations contradicted the information obtained in the interviews.

Since initiating this research I have become far more aware of my own instruction, and of the participation in my classrooms. Although I may not be able to address all of the imbalances which exist in the class, I feel the issues

identified by the students and instructors has made me more aware of the inequities that exist. In fact, I often consciously reflect on situations which arise and examine possible causes and strategies to address the imbalance. I am also far more aware of the role I play in the classroom dynamics. After conducting this research, I feel that understanding the diversity of the student population and some of the disadvantages students may experience assists me in examining the inequalities which exist in the classroom.

One item which stands out in the interviews was the interest in teaching strategies, and lesser interest in socio-cultural issues in teaching. The instructors felt that after many years in the classroom, what they needed were new activities and innovative strategies. In fact, Alicia said that:

> If I started reading an article that focused on the age or ethnicity and so on, I would probably stop reading and search for something relating to strategies that a teacher would use, that would interest me much more. The curiosity for me is always there to learn new techniques to improve one's repertoire. After a while you feel this is old hat and I as a teacher want to be learning new things. But something relating to [age, sex, culture, or educational background], I don't think that for a teacher who has been teaching for long it would have much relevance for me, you know if someone said 'I think men are better learners than women or not' and I would put it down after a couple seconds, because it doesn't matter what that person thinks. I wonder how they come to that conclusion, because after teaching for years if I don't agree with it. (ALICIA)

Nevertheless, it is difficult to separate the idea of strategies from the social context of the classroom. It is important to look beyond strategies and reflect on the student population and socio-cultural factors.

Another important finding of this study is that instructors should always examine their assumptions. There are many reasons why students are quiet or outgoing and some assumptions may disadvantage students. Assuming quiet students are afraid to speak, may result in them being addressed less frequently. Furthermore, some students --who had been deemed afraid -- said they liked being invited, but not forced, to speak. Other students were sometimes slow in answering questions, for various reasons. It was important to provide them the opportunity to work out the answer, as well as the opportunity to answer later. Another surprise was finding out that voice volume could affect a student's

desire to participate. Zarifa said students were too loud, which bothered her, but furthermore her quiet voice caused her not to be heard in large group discussions. Previous to this study, I would not have considered voice volume to be an issue which would strongly affect the participation of students.

As we look at the data obtained from the instructors and students, it is apparent that many of the issues affecting the students were not identified by the instructors. Examples of issues felt by students but not discussed by the instructors included: pregnancy, familial responsibilities, and voice volume. There may be many other issues also not perceived by the instructor, who must therefore be aware that the possibilities exist.

The presentation of Canadian culture compared to the cultures of the students is also important to examine. When tension or conflict arose in the classes due to cultural differences, the instructors stressed the importance of seeing cultures as different, that each person's culture is right for them, and that students should not judge one another as either right nor wrong. While the cultures of the students are examined as different, Canadian culture is outside of the discussion. Because the students are newcomers to Canada, they plan to live and work in Canada, and learn about Canadian culture in the ESL classroom. The instructed Canadian culture remains unquestioned, although it may be useful to recognize that the majority of ESL instructors are white, middle-class women. Perhaps it is because this white, middle-class status is seen to be normal that it remains unexamined.

Every instructor and student has his or her own approach or philosophy relating to teaching and learning. This research presents many issues which must be confronted daily in the classroom. I hope that the information presented will prove useful to instructors and students who experience these challenges or advantages.

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# Appendix

## 1. Request to Participate

July 4, 1994

Dear Instructor,

I am a Master of Education student at the University of Alberta, studying teaching English as a second language. I am conducting a study on classroom interaction, and would like to ask if you would participate. I intend to observe ESL classes which include interaction and oral teacher/student activities. I will present a consent form to all teachers and students involved, and explain the purpose of the study. No names will be used.

For the study, first I would like to observe the class four times, about one hour each time, and take notes. During the process of the observations I will try to separate myself as much as possible from the interaction in the class, so that the class will not be disturbed. Then, I would like to have an interview with you. After that, I hope to be able to interview some students. Finally, I would like to hold at least one more interview with you, and possibly the students, and discuss the findings. After the research is completed I will provide [this institution] with an executive summary of the findings.

The purpose of this study, is to increase the knowledge of the area, by providing insights into characteristics of classroom interaction that will be of use to many teachers, especially in ESL.

Mr. C. informed me that the study could be held between July 11 and August 15. I would greatly appreciate your participation in this study. If you are able to participate, please contact me at 435-6991 by Thursday, July 8, and we can arrange the times and dates which are convenient for you. If you have any questions, please feel free to call me. If I am not home, please leave a message on the machine.

Sincerely,

Lori Petruskevich

# 2. Consent Forms

Dear Teacher,

I am a master's student at the University of Alberta, learning about teaching ESL. I would like to ask if you would be in my study. For my study, I would like to watch your ESL class. I want to study the way people talk to each other and to the teacher, examining the differences and challenges based upon diversity.

First, I would like to attend each class four times. I will be watching conversations and taking notes. I will not use names in the study. No information about individual students or teachers will be used in my thesis, and no information will be given to the government.

After watching the classes, I would like to talk to you to hear how you feel about teaching. I also would like to ask some students about how they feel about studying English. Then I hope to talk to you, and perhaps the students, at least one more time to hear what else you want to tell me.

I want to study the way men and women from many different countries feel about studying in ESL classes. I am also interested in finding out about the ways instructors see the challenges and deal with them, so that I can make suggestions to teachers. I will give [this institution] my suggestions, so that the teachers and students can see them.

You do not have to participate in the study. If you decide during the study that you do not want to participate, just tell me I will stop observing you, and I will not include you in the study. This study will not hurt you in any way. It is <u>not</u> a test.

I understand that the study will not use my name. I understand that I can stop participating in the study whenever I like. I understand that the study is about how people talk to each other and to the teacher in an ESL classroom.

_____ _____

Signature of participant Date

_____

Print Name

Dear Student,

I am a master's student at the University of Alberta, learning about teaching ESL. I would like to ask if you would be in my study. For my study, I would like to watch your ESL class. I want to study the ways people talk to each other and to the teacher.

First, I would like to attend each class four times. I will be watching conversations and taking notes. I will not use names in the study. No information about individual students or teachers will be used in my thesis, and no information will be given to the government.

After watching the classes, I would like to talk to the teacher to hear how he or she feels about teaching. I also would like to ask some students about how they feel about studying English. Then I hope to talk to each teacher at least one more time to hear what else they want to tell me. I would also like to talk to the students one more time.

I want to study that way men and women from many different countries feel about studying in ESL classes so that I can make suggestions to teachers. I will give [this institution] my suggestions, so that the teachers and students can see them.

You do not have to participate in the study. If you decide during the study that you do not want to participate, just tell me or the teacher and I will stop observing you, and I will not include you in the study. This study will not hurt you in any way. It is <u>not</u> a test.

I understand that the study will not use my name. I understand that I can stop participating in the study whenever I like. I understand that the study is about how people talk to each other and to the teacher in an ESL classroom.

_____ _____

Signature of participant Date

_____

Print name

# 3. Interview Guide-Teachers

Tentative:

1. How long have you been teaching ESL?

2. What kinds of courses have you taught?

3. Have you received any special training for teaching ESL?

   If yes: What?

   If yes: Do you feel it has helped you? How?

4. Does this class resemble others you have taught before?

5. How would you describe the participation of the students in the classroom?

6. What can you tell me about teaching a class of students from diverse backgrounds.

7. Do you feel that all students participate to the same extent in the classroom?

8. What factors do you feel influences the participation in the classroom?

   Can you give examples of each.

9. Which students do you feel participate more in the classroom?

10. Which students do you feel participate less in the classroom?

11. What reasons do you see for the difference in participation?

12. a)Do you think that women and men behave differently in class?

   b) If yes: How?

   c) If yes: Why do you think they behave differently?

   d) Do you feel that men and women talk about different subjects in class?

13. Do you think that age differences are important for learning English? Why?

a) Do you think older students talk more, the same amount or less than younger students?

b) Do you feel that older students talk about different things than younger students?

14. a) Do you think that the varied ethnicity of the students gives rise to different behaviour in class?

b) If yes: Can you provide some examples?

c) Do you feel that students from certain countries/ cultural groups participate more or less than others?

15. a) Do you think that students with different educational backgrounds behave differently in class?

b) If yes: Can you provide examples?

c) Do you think that students with more educational experience participate in class more, less, or the same amount as those with less education?

16. Do any exceptions come to mind?

17. Do some students involve themselves more in certain kinds of activities?

18. a) Do you do anything to deal with imbalances in participation?

b) If yes: What do you do?

c) If yes: How successful do you find your strategies?

d) Do you feel this class responds the same way to your attempts as previous classes?

e) Do you change your strategies with each class?

19. a) Do you explain the objectives of activities to students before beginning them?

b) If yes: Does this seem to help encourage participation?

20. a) Which students do you feel have better language ability? lower ability?

b) Why do you think that is?

c) Do these students participate more in class?

# 4. Interview Guide-Students

Tentative:

1. Where are you from?

2. How long have you been in Canada?

3. a) Did you go to school in your home country?

   b) How many years did you study?

   c). What did you study?

   d) What was/were your school/s like?

4. What did you do in your home country?

5. Did you study English before?

   b) If yes: How long?

   c) If yes: How was English taught?

6. How long have you studied English here?

7. a) Did you study at any other schools?

   b) If yes: where?

   c)If yes: What were the other schools like? Were they different or the same as this class?

8. Do you like to learn English?

9. a) Do you talk a lot in class?

   b) Do you like to talk? Why or why not?

10. Who do you think talks a lot in class?

11. What do you like in class? Grammar? Reading? Listening? etc.

12. What do you not like in class?

13. a) Does the teacher try get you to talk?

b) What does the teacher do? Does it help?

14. Does the teacher tell you about what you are going to do? Does it help?

15. a) Do you think men and women behave differently in class?

b) If yes, How are they different?

c) Should they behave differently? Why? What do you think?

16. a) Is age important for learning English?

b) Do older students talk more or less than younger students?

c) Do older students talk about different things than younger students?

17. a) Do you think that students from different countries behave differently in class?

b) If yes: How?

c) If yes: What differences do you see?

18. May I ask how old you are?

19. Do you feel that you participate more or less because of your age?

20. Do you think that you behave a certain way because you are a woman/man?

21. a) Do you think that school in your home country is like school here?

b) Do you think that going to school in your home country helps or makes studying more difficult?

22. Do you think that you behave a certain way because of where you grew up?

23. What do you think the teacher could do to help you learn better?